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Volume 59  
Number 3  
(Whole Number 524)  
September 1985

Amazing® Science Fiction Stories, ISSN 0279-1706, is published bimonthly by TSR, Inc., (201 Sheridan Springs Road) P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Single copy price: \$1.75, plus 75 cents postage and handling. Subscription rates: \$9.00 for 6 issues (one year) sent to U.S. addresses; for Canada, subscription rates are \$11.00 for 6 issues. Subscriptions must be paid in advance in U.S. funds. All subscription requests should be sent to TSR, Inc., P.O. Box 72089, Chicago IL 60690.

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# AMAZING®

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES  
SEPTEMBER 1985

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# Opinion

## by Robert Silverberg

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Some time back — it was in the November, 1984 issue — I wrote a piece inveighing against the new clichés now prevalent in science fiction, and one that I cited was the female villain: the nasty, snarling space pirate, bounty hunter, narcotics peddler, or whatever, who in the bad old days of pulp-magazine fiction was always a man and who now, in the bad new days of junky paperback SF, has better than a fifty-fifty chance of being a woman.

Which led a reader named Robert Nowall to take me to task in the letter column of the March, 1985 issue. “In his discussion of the female villain,” he writes, “[Silverberg] appears to be implying that no woman can be a villain under any circumstances. Why can’t women be villains? Don’t they have as much right as men to be nasty and evil (or just to oppose the hero, in more sophisticated science fiction)?”

I don’t actually think reader Nowall and I are very far apart ideologically. But he’s missing, or at least sidestepping, my real point, which has nothing to do with affirmative action and everything to do with the quality of published science fiction. Sure, Mr. Nowall, women have *as much right* as men to be foul and violent and amoral. If a woman wanted to set herself up in business as the next Hitler, the next Attila, the next Jack the Ripper, who are we to tell her that such roles are reserved only for members of our sex? Are we to keep our women barefoot and pregnant, peeling potatoes in the

kitchen, while we alone go out to lie, cheat, maim, plunder, and destroy?

But — granting the right of women to equal-opportunity evil — I need to point out that most fiction about space pirates, interstellar drug smugglers, black-hearted slave traders, and other deplorable types tends to be pretty dumb junk. When we’re kids, we all have a certain innocent love of dumb junk, which is why comic books maintain their popularity generation after generation. There used to be a science-fiction magazine called *Planet Stories* when I was a boy that deliberately set itself up to be a kind of comic book in prose, and its pages were full of gorgeously silly stories about snarling villains and bug-eyed monsters. Isaac Asimov and Ray Bradbury and Poul Anderson wrote some of those stories (the better ones, I ought to add) and I would have written some too, if the magazine hadn’t happened to go out of business just about the time I was getting ready to sell my first stories, thirty-odd years ago. We all loved *Planet Stories*. We all still do, those of us who grew up on it; we’re likely to say to one another, “That there’s a real *Planet Stories* yarn,” and we’ll know exactly what we mean.

But there’s more to life — or literature, or even science fiction — than being twelve years old forever. A lot of us who loved *Planet Stories* worked long and hard during the 1950s and 1960s to create a kind of science fiction that might be of interest to grown-ups. In the 1970s we saw the flowering



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of that movement, and a lot of fine mature science fiction being written by the likes of Ursula K. Le Guin, Gene Wolfe, James Tiptree, Kate Wilhelm, J. G. Ballard, Brian Aldiss, and a host of others. But here in the 1980s we are starting to see the whole revolution of literacy within science fiction being undone. A horde of new readers, lured by *Star Trek* and *Star Wars*, have been rushing in, looking for paperbacks that give them that good old *Planet Stories* pizzazz, and the stuff is selling and selling and selling. That's no surprise. Junk always sells well. But it's sad to see so many of the bright female writers who came into the field in the 1970s turning out the junk too, and thinking that because their villains are female they're making some sort of feminist statement, when in fact all they're doing is writing the same old junk with one little modification.

That, Mr. Nowall, was my real point.

A kind of Gresham's law obtains in fiction as well as in coinage. Bad fiction drives out good. A publisher can put out only so many titles a month, and there's only so much room in the bookshops to display them. It's getting hard for some of the outstanding SF writers of the 1970s to keep their books in print more than a few weeks, and some of the most demanding and individual of them can't even get published at all in the United States. (It's a different story in Britain and France.)

A process is going on here that has become known in academic circles as "dumbing down." A generation of readers has emerged that has no real notion of history, of grammar, of art, or, it seems, of anything much else except the current pop music and hit movies and perhaps the latest in interactive computer games. They aren't stupid; they're simply empty. The

kind of intellectual training they've had at home and in the elementary schools has given them a line-of-least-resistance mentality that makes it difficult for them to learn. To quote Charles Muscatine, a professor of English at the University of California/Berkeley, "They can't read the same books as in the past, their attention spans are shorter, and their vocabulary is smaller. Their capacity to deal with abstract ideas is about two years behind what it was."

Realistic teachers and textbook writers, seeing that the situation is hopeless, are therefore hard at work "dumbing down" — making the courses easier, simplifying the textbooks, and in many other ways caving in to the catastrophe. If your students aren't up to Joyce and Faulkner, give 'em a course in science fiction; and if they can't handle Le Guin or Ballard either, why, give 'em *Planet Stories* stuff. Which sets in motion a self-propelling downward slide in education that will have even more horrendous consequences a generation from now when today's kids are the parents and the teachers themselves.

I object to the female villains in the new pulp SF not because they're female, but because they're villains — simple black-hearted incarnations of evil, stereotyped and boring, depressing revivals of dumb old clichés. All fiction needs conflict, sure. But conflict can take many forms, and the conflict of villains and heroes is the simplest, least subtle, and (I think) least interesting of them, especially in science fiction, where the interplay or challenging concepts is, or was, a primary aim. Evil in literature can be interesting and revealing — I need only cite Iago and Richard III — and Lady Macbeth! — but most of the time a reliance on the presence of all-out

evil to motivate a plot results in fiction mainly of interest to relatively undemanding children looking for a good wild roaring story.

It was useful to have *Planet Stories* around to lure twelve-year-olds into reading science fiction; and for those of us who were more than twelve it was a cute magazine, a kind of campy thing, that no one took seriously but

everybody enjoyed. But that was thirty-five years ago. Now, with the "dumbing down" process going on on our campuses, and science fiction reverting to adolescent triviality as it becomes overwhelmingly successful commercially, I can't help getting a little upset by the return of the interstellar dope-smugglers, no matter what their sex may be. ✂



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**Editor:** George H. Scithers

**Managing Editor:** Patrick L. Price

**Graphic Designer:** Ruth Hoyer

**Circulation Manager:** Georgia Moore

**Advertising Sales Administrator:** Debbie Poutsch

**Production:** Betty Elmore, Charles Ramsay, Roger Raupp

# Book Reviews

by Robert Coulson

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## **Enchantress**

by Han Suyin

Bantam, \$16.95 (hardcover)

This is a marvelous historical adventure, though there isn't much fantasy in it — a form of telepathy between twin brother and sister, some references to magic in the old Celtic religion, and perhaps a few of the mechanical contrivances, though I suspect most of them are factual. The protagonist sails to the Orient with his sister when both are what is now called "pre-teen," and grows up while he's designing clockwork mechanisms for the emperor of China and the king of Ayuthia (which is now Thailand). The background is fascinating; I'd love to read a good history of Ayuthia in the 1700s, to fill out the historical events that Suyin mentions; and I did pick up a history of clocks, though I haven't read it yet. In the foreground is the protagonist, Colin, who is pulled toward the ancient world of spirits and mental powers by his sister Bea, and toward the modern world of mathematics and machinery by his interests and abilities. An excellent mainstream novel which may or may not contain enough fantasy to satisfy the dedicated reader.

## **Age of Wonders**

by David Hartwell

Walker, \$15.95 (hardcover)

This is an excellent book. It's aimed primarily at people who know little about science fiction and are interested in learning about it, which I assume lets out most of my audience. I think

hardcore fans may well enjoy it — I did — but it's the beginning reader and the mundane (yes, that's a pejorative term) who will benefit from it. I found a lot of specifics to quibble about — for example, the statement, "Real space travel almost killed the science fiction field." The field had been declining for two to three years before Sputnik went up. But I agree almost completely with Hartwell's overall themes — while Sputnik didn't kill the field, it did nothing to aid it — contrary to what a lot of fans expected. The field just went right on declining. Hartwell knows his subject and makes it entertaining as well.

## **Dickson!**

by Gordon R. Dickson

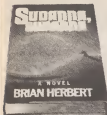
The NESFA Press, Box G, MIT Branch P.O., Cambridge, MA 02139, \$13.95 (hardcover)

A slightly belated review, due to disagreement over whether Catalano or I would have the honor of reviewing it; we send lists to each other, and when the same book appears on both lists, negotiations ensue. This is another of NESFA's small books to honor the major guest at a World Convention; in this case, the one in Los Angeles in 1984. It includes the stories "The Law-Twister Shorty," "Steel Brother," "The Hard Way," "Out of the Darkness," and "Perfectly Adjusted"; an article on the status of Dickson's "Childe Cycle"; an introduction by Poul Anderson; and story introductions by Sandra Miesel. Kelly



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Freas provides a very nice dust-jacket illustration. These are older stories; copyrights run from 1952 for "Steel Brother" to 1971 for "The Law-Twister Shorty." Gordy has been concentrating on novels in recent years. Most of the stories here are based on applied psychology: outwitting a person or group that considers itself superior. (There are echoes of Eric Frank Russell in a couple of them.) Highly recommended to anyone who hasn't already read most of the material.

### **The White Pipes**

by Nancy Kress

Bluejay, \$14.95 (hardcover)

This is a quite excellent gothic romance; as fantasy it's fair. The heroine is moderately talented, determined, and desperate. The hero, in common with most gothic heroes, is a nobleman: brilliant, overbearing, rude, and occasionally brutal. The fantasy involves the heroine's profession — "storygiving" by means of mentally created three-dimensional figures which act out the plot. This is an original idea, and well worked out. There are other and less pleasant mental powers, and the usual imaginary-medieval-country setting. It's well worked out, and I enjoyed it — Sir Bat Durstan, Sardonic Nobleman, and all — though it won't be appreciated by readers who demand science in their fiction.

### **Fire Watch**

by Connie Willis

Bluejay, \$14.95 (hardcover)

A short story collection, which includes the title story, "Service For the Dead," "Lost and Found," "All My Darling Daughters," "The Father of the Bride," "A Letter From the Clearys," "And Come For Miles

Around," "The Sidon In the Mirror," "Daisy, In the Sun," "Mail-Order Clone," "Samaritan," and "Blued Moon." Willis is one of the few among the newer writers who writes both fantasy and science fiction, and one of the even fewer who does them both well. Since you read the magazines (obviously, or you wouldn't be reading this one) it's likely that you've already read nearly all of these, but it's nice to have them under one cover.

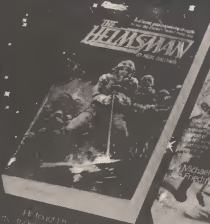
### **Alien Stars**

ed. by Elizabeth Mitchell

Baen Books, \$2.95 (paperback)

A trio of novellas. "The Scapegoat," by C. J. Cherryh, is about a future war with an alien enemy whose motivations make no sense by human standards. Neither does their way of making peace — but if not understood, it can be accepted and dealt with, by someone sufficiently dedicated. "Seasons," by Joe Haldeman, recounts the fate of a xenological expedition, which lands and starts studying with too little knowledge of the race it's working with. "Cordon Sanitaire," by Timothy Zahn, describes another scientific expedition: this one runs into a planet-wide booby-trap left behind by an unknown alien race. All three stories mix action-adventure with human emotional problems, and two of them are downers, if you're someone who requires happy endings. (I always felt that if a protagonist doesn't get killed occasionally, there is no suspense — which doesn't matter in some types of story, but does in action adventures. So I favor bleak endings just often enough so I can't be sure that everyone will live happily ever after.) Whatever your feelings are about endings, all of these stories are very good — especially if you have not read them before.

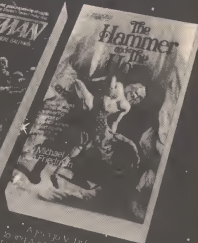
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### **Night's Daughter**

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Del Rey, \$2.95 (paperback)

A novel based on the plot of the opera "The Magic Flute." Even opera buffs seldom exclaim over the magnificent plots of their favorites, and while Marion does her best, the plot and characters here remain pretty simplistic. Still, it's a wild enough fantasy if you like strange and improbable creatures, and a relentless exploration of man's duty to fellow man and fellow creatures. Of course, I'm not an opera fan; those who are may well find this a remarkable adaptation. I consider it an interesting idea for a novel, but not entirely successful.

### **The Land of Unreason**

by L. Sprague de Camp

and Fletcher Pratt

Bluejay, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

Illustrated by Tim Kirk, who is probably the best humorous illustrator we have (even if I don't like him quite as well as I did Edd Cartier). This is an amusing tale of a man who swipes a bowl of milk set out for the fairies, and is in turn swiped by the fairies, as a changeling. Fairyland is the land of unreason; the dependable guides we have in our world aren't there. "That depends on which way north is, sir. Most times it's straight up." Our hero is sent on a mission by King Oberon, and manages to keep going from one ridiculous and dangerous situation to another until the climax, when he discovers that it all had a purpose and his true mission is greater than Oberon can command. It's a highly enjoyable book; only the restrained language hints that it was first published in 1941. This is the first new U.S. edition in too long a time.

### **Stepping From The Shadows**

by Patricia A. McKillip

Berkley, \$2.95 (paperback)

While this one is fantastic enough, it's not actually fantasy. I suspect it's fictionalized autobiography (but then, one always does suspect that in books like this, and one is often wrong). It depicts the growing up — not necessarily maturing — of a strange, shy, neurotic girl, who thinks poetically at a very improbable age, and creates her own fantasies of the Stagman, who interacts in her mind with the real world. The book fascinated me, though I would probably dislike the heroine if I met her in real life. There's lots of allusion and metaphor; critics should love it. I didn't notice any significant insight into the human condition, but I enjoyed the book. You probably will, too, unless you're strictly a science or action fan, or possibly an expert on psychology — the expert I consulted didn't think much of it. Give it a try.

### **The Song of Mavin Manyshaped**

by Sheri S. Tepper

Ace, \$2.75 (paperback)

This one has the advantage of a very interesting opening and a good conclusion. It opens in the demesne of a clan of shape-shifters, in the usual imaginary-and-highly-improbable-medieval world. The details of clan life in a totally strange culture are fun to puzzle over and try to work into a coherent background. The conclusion is rousing, with an assortment of weird creatures banded together against the Enemy. It's left open for sequels, of course; very few writers anymore have the ingenuity to concoct a separate world and characters for each novel, and very few readers require it. There is a fairly standard Journey in the middle of the book, but fortunately it doesn't last long. I'm not particu-

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larly fond of quest-and-sorcery books (oh, you guessed?), but I mostly enjoyed this one. There's a tendency for characters to have the precise talents required for the plot and no others, but they're a good grade of plastic — one step up from cardboard — and they're generally amusing. That's all one can really expect, and more than one frequently gets.

### **Suicide, Inc.**

by Ron Goulart

Berkeley, \$2.75 (paperback)

Another of Goulart's zany novels about the zanier characters of the Barnum System. Goulart has a consistency rating second to none. If you like one of his books, you'll like all of them, because they're all much alike. The humor is fair if not hilarious, and it's spiced with nasty comments on human predilections. ("He used to work in the Faulty Parachute room. . . . You know, that's where you bet on whether a skydiver's chute'll open or not.") The sort of thing that would be popular now if it could be legalized. If you're cynical enough to think this is funny — I am, obviously — you'll like the book.

### **Great Kings' War**

by Roland Green and John F. Carr

Ace, \$2.95 (paperback)

I'm not much in favor of sequels, particularly sequels of other people's work. So I was very dubious about this sequel to H. Beam Piper's *Lord Kalvan of Otherwhen*. After finishing it, I'm still dubious; I dislike the idea of turning one of my favorite books into the opening chapter in the literary equivalent of a TV series. However, readers without my biases will probably like it. *Kalvan* provided enough of a world to sustain an open-ended series, and this book is very well done.

In the original, the arrival of Pennsylvania State Trooper Calvin Morrison in an alternate world precipitated a military and cultural renaissance. In this book, the forces of reaction have girded their loins and are attempting to crush the heretic, who of course strongly resists being crushed. Basically, the plot concerns political and military maneuvering; and if not up to the original, it's quite good SF-adventure. But I'm still not going to read the next one.

### **The Changeover**

by Margaret Mahy

Atheneum, \$11.95 (hardcover)

This is subtitled "A Supernatural Romance," with "romance" being used in both senses of the word. It's a fairly typical book for teen-age girls, except for the character of Sorenson Carlisle, Boy Witch. Sorry makes it something out of the ordinary. The author lives in New Zealand, and the book is set there, but that merely emphasizes the similarities of all Westernized cities and suburbs; change a half-dozen terms and it could have taken place in any middle-sized U.S. city. A good book for its intended audience; only a fair one — but somewhat unusual — for fantasy readers.

### **Dragontales, #1 through #10**

by Rhondi Vilott

Signet, \$2.25 each (paperback)

At least, from #5 on they've been \$2.25; earlier ones were \$1.95. Books for juveniles in which the reader is required to make decisions which affect the course of the story have proliferated in recent years, so evidently they're successful. This series has the usual variety of endings, plus alternate male and female protagonists; the odd-numbered books feature girls

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and the even-numbered ones feature boys. The endings in each book can vary from happy to unhappy to vari-

ous shades in between. Should be excellent for the younger market; I'm guessing, but I'd say ages 10 to 12.

## by Frank Catalano

### Free Live Free

by Gene Wolfe

Mark V. Ziesing, \$45.00 (cloth)

(P.O. Box 806, Willimantic, CT 06226)

Gene Wolfe is one of the best writers science fiction has. Even when he's not writing science fiction. Even when you're not sure he's not writing science fiction.

A case in point: *Free Live Free*, a weighty, illustrated 500-page novel. It's probably not the Gene Wolfe you'd expect, say, if all you'd read of his work was his previous mega-novel, the four-volume *BOOK OF THE NEW SUN*. When the fourth volume was published, I wrote, "It's hard to add anything new in praise to a series that has garnered most of the major science-fiction and fantasy awards, but *THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* is the best blend of philosophy and entertainment I've read in a long time." That was true in January 1983, and the same "blend" applies to Wolfe's latest effort, his first novel since that time. Except here the philosophy is not the driving force; it's the character who is more important, commenting indirectly on what we all experience daily.

If you're expecting the same type of story in this novel, or at least the same universe, you'll be disappointed. *Free Live Free* is not set on a far-future Earth; rather, it takes place in what appears to be contemporary New York. And there's no Guild of Torturers; the only torturing going on is the type most of us go through day-to-day.

Samuel Benjamin Free is an elderly man who owns a home that's to be torn down for a government project. He's taken in with him four boarders who aren't required to pay any rent (and thus, the title of the novel): a self-styled witch, a down-on-his-luck salesman, an overweight prostitute, and a private detective who's a bit sensitive about being short in stature. Three days later, Free's home is predictably demolished, despite efforts of Free and the boarders. But Free disappears, after cryptically mentioning that he has an old ticket to the "high country." The four boarders, now out on the street, reluctantly band together to find Free or his mysterious "ticket."

Doesn't sound much like a science-fiction plotline, does it? In truth, it's not. The only thing even vaguely science-fictional pops up in the last 20 pages. The plot description alone would generally just pull a yawn or two from me if someone were trying to get me to read it.

But with Wolfe's books, the plot description alone is not the novel. As with any good novel, it's the execution that counts. (Imagine the nightmares that comment brings to cover-blurb writers.) To be a writer of believable, memorable characters, you first have to be an observer of people. Wolfe has observed; and cuts to the quick with his characterizations that are sometimes cynical, sometimes oddball, but always humane. These folks have *reasons* for their often strange actions.

As a result, *Free Live Free* is a joy to simply read and not worry about



where the story is going. As with James P. Blaylock's *The Digging Leviathan* reviewed a couple of issues ago, Wolfe's novel takes a bunch of mismatched characters, throws them in with one another, and sees what happens. The plot is merely a byproduct of their interaction. It's what the characters observe that makes this book very good reading, and a lot of fun.

Which brings me to my lone gripe about it. The aforementioned SF element in the last 20 pages seems unwarranted, unneeded, and — after reading something so different — intrusive. Okay, so I usually gripe about loose plot ends. But trying to figure out the ins-and-outs of the story as they stood revealed when the gimmick "explained" them slowed the novel. And no, I won't say what the gimmick is because knowing takes away a lot of the anticipation, though none of the enjoyment of the reading.

(Incidentally, the edition reviewed here is a signed, limited one that is already sold out at the time I write this. However, it should turn up in a mass-market edition shortly.)

So what is *Free Live Free*? SF, fantasy, mainstream, or what? You'll recall arguments like that began over attempts to similarly pigeonhole *THE BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* (Wolfe maintains it's SF, set on a far-future Earth). The simple answer is *Free Live Free* is just what any one book should be: good reading. And let the marketers have their nightmares.

### **The Man Who Melted**

by Jack Dann

Bluejay Books, \$14.95 (cloth)

*The Man Who Melted* definitely is science fiction, but not the kind of stuff you'd recommend to someone who loved Heinlein or Niven. Like

both those authors, Jack Dann was on the Nebula ballot this year. But *The Man Who Melted* is a disturbing, moving, and brilliant SF novel of a type that rarely gets published, let alone recognized with an awards nomination.

As a matter of fact, word is *The Man Who Melted* made the rounds for a long time before even finding a publisher in Jim Frenkel at Bluejay. That's understandable; it's not a novel that's going to appeal to readers who want pure escapist SF, or want their SF to be "safe." It may be SF; but, like Wolfe's work, it defies being put in a pigeonhole.

*The Man Who Melted* challenges the reader. It's not tough to read — Dann's prose is crisp and smooth. It's the ideas that are challenging. Marriage based on incest. Hooking into the dead to share their experiences moments after they die. Organ gambling. All set in the story of Raymond Mantle, who has completely forgotten memories shared with his missing wife, Josiane. As he searches for her, he travels through a world which governments are struggling to hold together, a world ravaged by the Screamers. It is to the Screamers — individuals who lose their identity and travel in a telepathically-linked mob — he must go to find Josiane. And to get to the Screamers, he has to deal with a new religion that worships them, facing the Screamer that resides in him.

Various bits and pieces of this novel may seem familiar because parts of it have appeared elsewhere. The most recent was "Blind Shemmy" in *Omni*, which I truly didn't care for — it handled the organ-gambling end of it, and struck me as technically excellent, but without life or a character you could care about. Now, that same

piece integrated into the whole comes alive because it's only a small part in the larger framework. Dann puts the pieces together extremely well. The book does not come across as a conglomeration of shorter works.

Oh, did I mention there's also a final voyage onboard the S.S. *Titanic* (death optional)? *The Man Who Melted* works as a novel because Dann has obviously gone to a lot of trouble to give his world depth. That depth shows how all these items can interrelate to form the kind of society he's talking about, a dark society close to the edge of self-destruction, but where individuals are not without hope. And to top it off, it's a good satisfying story.

### **Ender's Game**

by Orson Scott Card

Tor Books, \$13.95 (cloth)

More conventional, but still pretty powerful, is Orson Scott Card's latest. The author has taken his first published SF story from the pages of *Analog* in 1977 and expanded it. The result is his fifth novel, his best yet.

*Ender's Game* is a fast-paced "coming of age" story with a twist — the "coming of age" ties in with saving the world. Earth has been invaded — twice — by aliens known only as "buggers," and the planetary military coalition is hastily looking for a military commander who can beat the buggers a third time, since the first two victories were near-losses. The government has taken to monitoring kids . . . and chosen six-year-old Andrew "Ender" Wiggin to attend Battle School. Wiggin, though, has the usual obstacles: a sadistic brother, loving sister, and military teachers who have taken the training games a lot more seriously than their students.

I don't recall right off where the shorter work began or what it covered,

but the impression I get is that this novel, unlike many others made from short works, doesn't just use the shorter bit as a chunk (as Card himself did in *The Worthing Chronicles*). Instead, it's spread about in bits and pieces throughout the whole novel, with additional material at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end. As a result, it's much smoother reading than most adaptations to long form.

*Ender's Game* is a page-turner, despite a few stylistic flaws that seem to have bothered Card throughout his young writing career. The six-year-old has a decidedly "adult" psychology. The characters sometimes give mechanical and pedantic speeches, as though they'd been practicing them. Still, it keeps your interest, the story and the ending are satisfying, as is the progression of how *all* the characters evolve, no easy feat in itself. And there are enough characters and conflicts that if one starts to get bored, something else is perking. Though not so many you need a scoreboard to keep track of the players.

I've been avoiding putting any of the books in this column in categories, but *Ender's Game* will appeal to anyone who enjoys fast-paced, hard SF with characters who have some depth to them.

### **Dayworld**

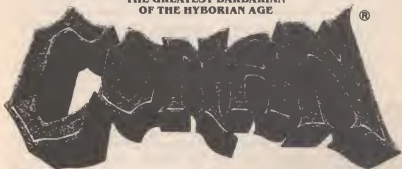
by Philip José Farmer

G.P. Putnam's Sons, \$16.95 (cloth)

*Dayworld*? Not *another* sequel to *Riverworld*!

No, the Gods of *Riverworld* have saved us from more self-indulgent repetition, though the latest Farmer effort does seem a bit overly-familiar. The reason: *Dayworld* is based on Farmer's classic short story, "The Sliced-Crosswise-Only-On-Tuesday World."

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Though the basis is classic, even the casual book browser may worry about this one. The novel begins with a four-page author's preface explaining the idea behind the world. That always brings to my mind the suspicion the author didn't explain it well enough in the story, and thus has to warn the reader of the murky depths ahead. Even worse: the dust jacket promises *Dayworld* is the first installment in yet another series.

Okay, enough bitching for the moment, Catalano. What's the story like? Well, due to overpopulation and resource shortages, people are only allowed to live one day a week. The rest of the time they spend "stoned": in stasis, waiting for their live day. Now, 1330 years have gone by since the Stoner society began, and some are wondering if the original reasons for beginning all this still hold. One of them is Jeff Caird, a member of the "immer" family, those who have access to a method to extend their lifetimes. Unknown to the government, Caird and some other immers are also daybreakers, people who live more than one day a week, using different personas. The problem: Caird is asked to find a renegade day-

breaker who threatens to expose the immers; and his seven personas, kept carefully separate in his mind, must partly meld to handle the job. And Caird himself may turn out to be a threat to the immers as a result.

The book does do well in certain areas: each of the seven days has developed its own fads and societal structures within the constraints of the overall Stoner society — and watching Caird wade through it all is interesting. The storytelling is adequate, but there is no real compelling reason to keep reading until you realize Caird himself may be in danger. Unfortunately, that doesn't come across until two-thirds of the way through the book. Farmer's descriptions of the seven different societies just aren't enough to completely hold a reader's interest; few travelogues are. The ending, too, is a letdown — two chapters before it's over, it builds to a crescendo, but then sort of trickles off into the sunset.

While *Dayworld* takes some interesting ideas and trots them out for display, the main storyline is too predictable to make for a memorable read. Farmer has done much better.

✕



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# Discussions

## by the Readers

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*A word, first of all, about three little boxes which are not the same.*

*If you want to send us money for an annual subscription only, the money is cheerfully accepted by Amazing® at P.O. Box 72089, Chicago IL 60690.*

*Communications about any other matter (i.e., subscription complaints, orders for back issues of the magazines, or requests for copies of our Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy) go to our office of publication at P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147. Feel free to send letters of comment there — that way our staff there can read them before sending them on.*

*Manuscripts may be sent directly to P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101. We like it here; we like editing Amazing® and expect to be doing it for a good many years to come — but we do want you to make sure (by buying and reading this magazine) that this address remains current. We were rather touched by the faith in the durability of institutions of an Englishman who recently sent a story to the publisher Amazing® had twenty years ago. But surely taking things on faith, trusting that the old ways will serve, are not attitudes we want to cultivate in science fiction!*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I recently finished the January issue of *Amazing®*, and would like to comment on the first story therein: "Gaby," by Andrew Greeley.

This was a well-written, interesting

story that seemed to live up to the author's blurb as a best-selling novelist — except for one thing. Six times he started a subordinate clause with "like." Example: "— looked like he was carrying a bomb —"; "— at least like it seemed to do —". Every time he did it, it hit me as if an attractive, cultured young lady had wiped her nose with the back of her wrist!

An interesting thing about this is that, in the first three pages of the story, the same locution is used correctly, with "as if" or "as though" instead of "like." It occurred to me that a busy editor (you?) had started to blue-pencil the script and either was called away by other tasks or, after three of the same errors, said "the hell with it!"

That locution fits well into the author's style. He uses it effectively. He ought to learn to do it right.

Thinking about this reminded me that the level of writing in SF mags is pretty high; I rarely encounter annoying examples of bad English usage in *Amazing®* or *Asimov's* (to both of which I subscribe). Or perhaps it is the level of editing that gives the end result?

To change the subject, the January issue was a good one. All the stories were worth reading. Being a retired scientist, my favorite "fix" is hard SF, and there is disappointingly little in either magazine. I realize that you can print only what you get, but I hope you encourage "hard" writers as much as you can.

Yours truly,  
Deane S. Thomas, Jr.  
495 Manse Lane  
Rochester NY 14625

*I insist on correct English;  
you overemphasize fine points of  
usage;  
he is full of schoolmarm shibboleths.  
Perfect agreement cannot be found;  
usage panels are rarely unanimous.  
For my part, I found "like" to be  
quite acceptable in your two citations  
— but it would not have worked in the  
counterexamples where the author  
used "as if" or "as though." There  
must be a difference: care to discover  
and define what it is?*

*We have our standards — and our  
shibboleths — here, and we have  
arguments about them at times. Ask  
George about "turning on one's heel"  
sometime. I can find a reason against it  
in SF, and it is a completely different  
one from his!*

— Dainis Bisenieks

Dear Mr. Scithers,

While on an extended trip working  
on telephone systems in Japan, I  
needed some relaxing reading material.  
I went to a large book store which  
stocks quite a variety of American  
books and magazines and bought a few  
SF paperbacks. Among the items I  
purchased was *Amazing*®, the Novem-  
ber 1984 number. The thing that  
caught my eye was a piece by Robert  
Silverberg called "Opinion."

He hit the nail right on the head  
with his dissection of current non-  
mainstream fiction. I hesitate to use  
the phrase SF because, you see, he did  
not carry his analysis quite far enough.  
I personally am sick and tired of buy-  
ing something labelled "science fic-  
tion" only to find that it falls into the  
category of "fantasy." The two are

quite different, as different as an  
English murder mystery and an action  
adventure by the likes of Alistair  
MacLean. Now, I realize that "science  
fiction" and "fantasy" sometimes  
overlap due to the very nebulous  
nature of the genre (now there's an  
overused word!).

So, my complaint lying squarely at  
your feet, I then began to read the  
fiction in that issue of *Amazing*®  
"science fiction" Stories. What did I  
find but "One Final Dragon," which  
looked like it fit into Silverberg's  
Celtic lore category, which I let fall  
into the "fantasy" slot. It certainly  
wasn't science fiction (where was the  
science?).

I was about to stop reading "Young  
Dr. Eszterhazy" when I saw the  
degree sign over letter o's. What alpha-  
betic nonsense! The symbol itself  
modifies Danish and Norwegian a's to  
sound like the "aw" in "hawk." What  
could it possibly do for the o in Borg?  
I was thinking that it was such an  
absurdity that rivaled the nonsense  
words "haagen dazs" (try using strict  
rules of pronunciation on **THAT** one!  
They come out "ha [as in happy] aw  
[as in awful] gen-daws [as in jaws] es  
[as in mazes].) However, I did finish  
that story after I realized what a joke it  
was going to be! Delightful, but hardly  
science fiction.

"But Wait, There's More!" belonged  
in *Mad Magazine*.

"The Six-Legged Bear" was, uh, not  
science fiction, nor was it fantasy, but  
I guess it was more SF than anything  
else. The only "hardware" story was  
"Cleaving" (which I didn't like); I  
never even got to "Medium."

So, the score is one SF, one almost  
SF, one that read like fantasy, two  
humor, and one unknown. So, out of  
eight pieces that your contents page  
labelled as fiction, only 1½ were

science fiction.

It's enough to make me start a campaign at bookstores to separate "science fiction" out of the rest of the "fantasy," "dragons and lizards," "Celtic and Nordic lore," and "alternate fantastic magic-ridden universes" stuff. If I want to read stories about magic, I'd certainly not want to look for them in shelves labelled SCIENCE FICTION.

Thanks for listening.

Please publish more SCIENCE fiction.

Todd Wicks  
Palo Alto CA

*There's more than one type of science fiction; for each issue of Amazing® Science Fiction Stories we try to choose a balance between "soft" and "hard" SF (including some fantasy and humor to round out the selection). Using just "hard" nuts & bolts SF would tend to get rather monotonous after a while.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

The March, 1985 issue of *Amazing®* was fantastic! I hope to see a sequel to "Hellflower" soon. It is the best magazine SF story I've read in a long time. Ms. Shahar did a fine job on the story; Captain St. Cyr, Tiggy, and Paladin were very believable characters. It was the kind of story that just pulls you into the action. If there is a sequel, it would be nice if Ms. Shahar would switch viewpoints in each new scene; in one scene, we would see things as Tiggy did, and in the next, we would see things as Cyr did. I hope Ms. Shahar's next story isn't too different from this one.

James Turpin's "The Perfect Day" was also terrific. I find it hard to believe that that was his first sale — he

writes like a seasoned professional.

"The Perfect Day" has the same feel and atmosphere that Ray Bradbury's classic *Something Wicked This Way Comes* has — and Mr. Turpin's own special touch. I hope to see more of his stories soon.

I also enjoy the many departments in *Amazing®*, such as Robert Silverberg's "Opinion," the Book Reviews, Screen Reviews and your own "Observatory" column — and, of course, "Discussions."

And speaking of "Discussions," I notice that you have been running several of Carol Deppe's "weird" letters lately. They're amusing and unique, but three letters in one issue? And each of them two to three columns long? Ms. Deppe's letters are fun to read, but three in one issue is a little much. Sure, one or two every other issue would be nice. But readers will soon tire of reading about paperclips and Science Fiction Writers Anonymous and people who say "we."

In closing, this March issue was the best I've read so far. I'm looking forward to reading the next *Amazing®*.

Thank you,  
Jack Lowe  
Addison IL

*Authors as well as readers are torn between the pleasure of more of the same and the challenge of something different. We do our best to bring about a transition at the right point — and hope to please you as much with future issues.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Along with Robert Coulson, I enjoy Carol Deppe's letters. I do wish you would at least steal a few of her paperclips to make her feel more loved and accepted. Better yet, I would like to



see some of her fiction in print, if it is at all as funny as her letters.

I have enjoyed your selections in this magazine as well as in *Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*. I am curious, though, about a change in tone. Do you no longer enjoy puns? Some of the past stories I found humorous, some not, but I am curious as to their omission in *Amazing® Stories*.

Love and kisses,  
Sonja McCammon  
Cedar Park TX

*Alas — very few Painfully, Horribly, Excruciatingly good pun stories have shown up in our mailbox of late. (There are a few that we bought many months ago coming up soon in Amazing®.) The problem, we suspect, is that all the readily thought-of puns have long ago been used up. (Of course, we'd like to be proved wrong.)*

*Amazing® is not a continuation of Asimov's: Shawna McCarthy has ably taken that magazine off in new directions. Amazing®, since we assumed the editorial reins, has changed to fit our ideas of a good SF magazine, just as Asimov's reflected our idea when we were there. An editor's personality comes through in small (but unmistakable) ways: story choice, story blurbs, editorials, and so on. There is automatically going to be some resemblance between the old Asimov's and the new Amazing® — but, we hope, enough differences as well (such as fantasy in Amazing®) that neither readers nor editors get bored.*

*We're planning on staying interested for a long time yet to come.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

If *Amazing®* is ever looking for an off-beat sort of anthology to publish, I highly recommend collecting Carol

Deppe's letters. I read the November and March selections aloud to my husband and a visiting friend and they had laughing fits that were terrifying to behold.

By the by, if Dr. Deppe's really out to avoid writing, joining a writer's club is not the answer. The *real* answer is to tell family and friends that she is at work on the Great American Novel.

If that won't stop her word processor in its tracks, she's beyond human help.

Sincerely,  
Christine Watson Trowbridge  
16511 S. Garfield #38-C  
Paramount CA 90723

*Strange you should mention anthologies: TSR, Inc., just gave Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg the go-ahead to prepare The Amazing® Stories: 60 Years of the Best Science Fiction — consisting of the best, most-memorable stories from Amazing®'s 520-odd issues. After 59 years, we've certainly published a lot of excellent material! The preliminary table of contents includes fiction by Asimov himself, Robert Bloch, Robert Sheckley, Philip K. Dick, Ursula K. Le Guin, Ron Goulart, Philip José Farmer, James Tiptree, Jr., John Varley, and lots of others.*

*It's fun to look back and think that Amazing® was the first magazine to publish Isaac Asimov, Ursula K. Le Guin, Roger Zelazny, and so many more now-major SF writers. Today the magazines are still the first place many future award-winners get their start. Which writers in Amazing®'s pages will win Hugos in five years . . . or this year?*

— George Scithers

Dear George:

This week's paperclip shipment

arrived right on schedule. You boys are really shaping up out there. A few more like this and we can all retire. The big ones are dissolving remarkably well, so I'm glad you finally got that size-glitch ironed out and stopped sending them back.

Another thing. If this Carol Deppe person gets any more funny ideas, just humor her. Leave her paperclips alone. We can afford to lose them.

And though I'm sure you don't need to be reminded after all this time: shred this letter immediately. No use taking chances when we're so close.

Look sharp,  
Kyle Silfer  
Fort Plain NY 13339

*Okay, consider your letter hereby shredded. (Publication does that, you know.)*

*Not only are we leaving Carol Deppe's paperclips alone, but rumor has it that Stan Schmidt, the editor of Analog, sent her an entire box of them. This should keep her busy for quite a while, what with the clothes-hanger shortage and all.*

*We just bought a story from Dr. Deppe — watch for "Everybody Draws Lines" about five or six issues from now.*

— George Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I was delighted to read that *Amazing*® will soon be on TV. Science fiction (make that good science fiction) is rare in that medium. I'm sure your presentations will help change that.

I'd also like to toss in my two-cents on the raging *Amazing*® format debate. Most of the changes suggested seem to be aimed at adjusting toward the formats of some of the other magazines in the market. That surprised me. I'd always pictured the average science-

fiction reader (myself included) as less inclined to deviate toward the norm. I like the differences in your format, whether they are time-honored tradition or new, innovative ideas.

I realize that sometimes the term "different" can be synonymous with "in the red" when speaking financially, but your format differences are not so drastic that they could spell doom. In the long run your editorial policies, not your artwork, will decide that.

However (I bet you could see that coming), I have some other comments. I find myself enjoying about half of the numerous pieces of poetry, which leads me to the conclusion that you don't need quite so many poems. Also, Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson seemed out of place on your pages. It was a well written and amusing piece but still seemed out of place. Finally, why not use smaller type and print more stories?

Sincerely,  
Steven Frederick  
Cypress TX 77429

*The TV show is in other hands than ours — and quite capable ones. There are sound reasons (including legal ones) why we do not have even a finger in its affairs; we do not ever even point a finger (like, say, toward a story we think would suit them).*

*We find that the type size used for all except certain features is about as small as type can be for comfortably sustained reading. It is, to be technical, 10 points with 1-point leading (10/11 for short). There are 12 points to a pica and 6 picas to an inch . . . and so much for the metric system!*

— George Scithers

*Ed. Note: When we received the following campaign letter, several of*

*the words had been partially crossed out. We have carefully deciphered them and placed them in brackets and italics. They shed a rather different light on the campaign platform . . .*

#### ATLANTIC ADEPTS PARTY

[Nyarlahotep]

Ambrose Dexter, MD, PhD

Campaign Chairman

Please allow me the liberty of bringing to your attention the Atlantic Adepts Party ticket for 1984: Great Cthulhu for President and Yog-Sothoth for Vice-President.

Our candidates may not be as well known as some of their opponents, since they discount the value of "beauty contest" politics. However, they are well known in Kadath, R'lyeh, Leng and Far Carcosa. Further, many notable Americans, including Mr. Robert Putney Drake of Long Island, Mr. Charles Dexter Ward of Arkham, Mr. Randolph Carter of Kadath, and Capt. Jedediah Marsh of Innsmouth have *[felt their wrath]* learned of their ability.

It is fitting in this, the second century since the founding of this nation, that we elect these *[monsters]* candidates; they have a far greater knowledge and *[experience]* sense of history than any possible opponent. Further, they represent Massachusetts and Virginia, the states which led our nation in the Revolution and, in early years, gave it its first six Presidents.

While I do not have enough space to give you a full exposition of our Party's platform, it proposes extensive urban *[destruction]* renewal, an end to *[all]* over-population and human-inflicted damage to the environment, to *[eat]* reduce the number of Federal bureaucrats, to place all the world's nations on an equal footing in military

and economic terms, and to utterly eliminate unemployment.

We invite you to join in our campaign song — "Ph'nglui mglw'nagh Cthulhu R'lyeh whag'nagl fhtagn" — and write to our candidates at the addresses below for details.

Great Cthulhu  
General Delivery  
Innsmouth, Mass.

or

[R'lyeh] Raleigh, NC

Yog-Sothoth  
The Pentagon  
Arlington, VA

Dear Editors:

A hearty handshake and a pat on the back to Robert Silverberg for his insightful editorial in your March issue. I couldn't agree more.

Turning away from nuclear reactors in favor of coal is not only blatantly foolish, it could also be considered criminally negligent. It is well known that much of the acid rain falling in Canada is caused by American emissions, so your short-sightedness is not only your concern. On top of that, when Canada and several European countries signed an agreement in 1984 to begin reducing dangerous emissions, the United States did nothing. So while Ronnie Reagan moans about the cost of cleaning up, your increasing pollution continues to kill our lakes.

And what about those hideous problems inherent in the mere idea of nuclear power generation? As Mr. Silverberg pointed out, nuclear reactors have yet to kill anyone; neither have terrorists built that fabled A-Bomb with stolen plutonium. As far as nuclear waste goes, you're not actually *burying* it down there yet, are you? In Canada all of the spent fuel from our

reactors is stored on-site. It is kept in deep pools of water which absorb the radiation, and there it will remain until a safe method of disposal can be found. (There is an ongoing research project investigating the possibility of burying it deep in the rock of the Canadian Shield.) Even if it has to remain there for years, the electricity generated by the plants will easily pay for any storage costs.

Mr. Silverberg also mentioned the possibility of a much less radioactive thorium reactor as an alternative. I would direct his attention to an article in the December 1984 issue of *Omni* concerning the possibility of an aneutronic reactor. Yes, aneutronics would be just as good as it sounds. It would produce no neutrons, and therefore no radioactive wastes, and no threats of meltdowns. It would achieve all of this by using positively charged protons to

split lithium.

And *finally*, I would like to thank Mr. Silverberg for complimenting our CANDU reactor system. I think the only other things I've ever heard an American compliment us on are our handgun controls and our rock and roll. (Certainly not our weather.) And remember, even if you *are* doomed to continue on that path toward a turn-of-the-century system of power generation, your friends north of the border will always be here to bail you out. My home province of Manitoba has only one nuclear reactor, since most of our power comes from hydro-electric plants, but I'm sure you could convince us to build another one to keep Minnesota warm at night.

If the price is right.

Verbosely yours,

Roy C. Dudgeon  
Darlingford, Manitoba

✂

Well, yes; we *are* looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000-word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to assist you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us \$2.50; three copies, \$3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is \$2.00. If you subscribe to AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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# THE AMULET OF THE FIREGOD

by J. O. Jeppson

art: Artifact





*The author is a psychiatrist, psychoanalyst, and science-fiction writer. Her husband, a biochemist, also writes science fiction.*

"I have interrupted the preparations for your journey because I want to give you my necklace," said the Secretary-General, sitting down as if she were going to stay.

Reya avoided the Secretary-General's ruthless blue eyes, old but distinctly unfaded, and concentrated on the necklace. The simple blue dress showed it to advantage, if anything that ugly could have an advantage.

The clumsily twisted metal chain might be partly gold. In front, it had been pushed out to form a basket that contained a dull stone with two shiny spots on it, almost like eyes.

Reya felt herself shudder, and did not know why. "I'm sorry, Madame Secretary-General. There won't be room. I mean, it might get in the way."

"Nonsense. You must hear what I have to say."

"The tri-vid crews are waiting, and I have to make a farewell speech. . . ."

"First I must make one to you. I am owed that much of your time. All these years, these long years, of getting power, forging a world government out of the U.N., persuading them to provide funds for you, giving my own money . . ."

"You did that! You were the private donor?"

"Yes. You will give me — this moment." She took off the ugly necklace and placed it on the small table between their chairs. "Put your right hand on the amulet."

In fear she had never known before, Reya obeyed. At once, her hand was covered by Madame's hand, so tightly that Reya could not move.

"Close your eyes, Reya. You are beautiful, tall and strong, intelligent and determined. You are the one. It will be you. Listen carefully to the story of our amulet, for it does not always come easily."

"Am I supposed to start believing in witches, too, Madame Secretary-General?" said Reya sardonically.

"Perhaps. Hear the story of the first woman to wear the amulet of the firegod."

**T**he firegod of this forsaken place is always angry, but I am not afraid of him the way my mate is. I am sorry for my mate, because he is a good man, and left the tribe only because I wished to take our raft far beyond the limits of our territory. When the storm came and drove us farther westward I pretended to be terrified too. I could not tell him that I was glad. Now I have seen land that no one had ever seen before, because there is nothing here that any tribe has left behind.



And I have found the amulet. It is *mine*. My mate is afraid and says it belongs to the firegod. He thinks the two shiny spots are the firegod's eyes, dooming us to a horrible death. I don't care. I like the shape and feel of the stone, the way it just fits into the palm of my hand and warms with my skin heat. I have opened the strands of my wedding necklace and placed the amulet inside.

I told my mate that the amulet is a lucky stone, because since I found it, we have not starved. We have been able to catch fish, and there are thousands of birds' eggs to eat. There is also driftwood for repairing our raft.

Best of all, we have found passion again. Perhaps it is because we are well-fed and feel better than we have in a long time, or because we are so alone. I do not know, or care, because I have now experienced such great fulfillment in my body that I regret I am no longer young, and that we have never had children.

No longer young? I do not feel old. While my mate sleeps, tired from our love-making, I dance near the firegod, wearing the amulet. It seems as if the firegod dances and talks with me. I touch the amulet and feel that I belong to him. . . .

When I told my mate that I was with child because I danced with the firegod, he hit me and cursed the god. He said that if I did not bear a son with hair as black as his, he would cut off all my hair because it looks so much like fire.

Then the firegod took revenge and burst out from the rocks. My mate fell and broke his head, and I cradled him while his life went away and I sobbed at my wickedness for becoming spell-bound by this lonely, strange land. I sacrificed my mate's body to the firegod so I would be permitted to leave. I tried to throw the amulet after my mate's body, but I could not. I took it with me on the raft.

I have not seen land for days in this fog. The dried fish is nearly gone, and the eggs I ate long ago, and the bodies of birds. The skins my mate wore I made into a big cloak to catch the wind, and it works, but now there is little wind in the fog, and I am alone and lost.

At night, the sea rolling under my raft, I have terrible dreams of doom from the firegod, burning and burning, darkening the sky and killing everything. I must find land — and people — because the child within me is growing.

I did not want the new tribe to know that my mate is dead and cannot protect me, so I told them that I am a bride of the firegod. Their hair is so pale that they believed me, and they are afraid of the amulet.

When I had my daughter, I gave her my name because she has hair like mine, and the same mole on her right cheek. When the leader of the tribe

looked at the two of us, he said I must be a goddess. I now have power over the tribe, and I teach them the ways of the sea, how to use the fish, and how to make a cloak to catch the wind, but as my daughter grows I feel restless, wishing to move on, away from the tribe.

No lover satisfies me any more, yet I do not seem to age like other women. I yearn to teach, to change things. I have discovered many things I could teach other tribes, and I am afraid of nothing now, for when I use the flint and bring the firegod from nothingness, I do not even fear him. Perhaps the amulet protects me. The visions it brings are now part of me — dreams of the dark sky and the dying — but when I tell it to the people here they are afraid — of *me*. . . .

I told the tribe that I was ill and had to go far away to die in peace. I took my daughter beyond the mountains, where I found a tribe that did not know me, or how old I am. Yet now I must leave again, because my daughter is going to marry the leader's son; and if I stay, she will be in danger. I am staying too young, and I must not become a goddess for *her* tribe, or they may turn against us both. Power is always dangerous.

I will make another start. I will go further east, and south, into warmer lands the travelers tell of, where I can teach other tribes what I know. If I do get old there, life will be easier.

My daughter cried, but I told her that she should never be afraid of change, or learning, or even visions that trouble sleep, because there may be truth in them about the future — or the past, I do not know which.

Finally, I am ready to give up the amulet. I will hang it about the neck of my daughter Freya when I say goodbye.

**T**he Secretary-General's fingers tightened on Reya's hand as it tried to withdraw. "The amulet is not finished, Reya."

"I don't know why you frighten me so. I am never frightened. Are you a ventriloquist? I opened my eyes once and heard the story, but your lips were not moving."

The Secretary-General sighed. "I am glad you — experienced the story. Sometimes I have thought that only I . . ."

"What are you talking about? What kind of experience?"

The other woman did not seem to hear her. She looked past Reya, eyes unfocussed, silver hair thrown back. "The amulet — the mystery . . ."

"Please, Madame — answer me!"

"I don't understand the process, not even after all these years. Possibly the information is already coded, like frozen music, in my cells, and the amulet evokes it."

"You are not making sense," said Reya, "and I must leave. Let me go!"

"No. There is more you must know."

Reya tried to smile. "I think, Madame Secretary-General, that you are

telling your own version of a Norse myth. Wasn't Freya the Norse goddess of beauty, love, and fertility?" Would the insane grip ever relax?

"Beauty, love — ah, yes. And, of course, fertility. The Norse Freya wore the necklace of the Brisings, although the amulet is not mentioned, but then she left it behind with her daughter to be passed on, generation after generation, in secret. Stories went with it, tales dating from Neolithic times when the first Freya . . ."

"My sons are growing fast," said Reya sharply, "and I do not want them to have this necklace. Do not give it to me."

"You will not give it to your sons. The necklace is passed from mother to daughter."

"Or to some younger woman if the older one has no daughter?"

The Secretary-General bent her head. Was she laughing? "I suppose I could try to tell you that the necklace is for inducing fertility."

"You're an educated woman! You can't possibly believe that, or expect me to."

"Calm yourself, Reya, and listen again. There were many women who wore the amulet in succession, but I will tell you about only a few. I think you will be interested in this next woman."

**I**t was getting dark when the man stumbled up to the door of my hut, but I told him to come in and warm himself.

"A woman! Where is your husband? I have need of help."

"I have no man. Some say my mother was a witch and slept with trolls to beget me, for I did not know my father. I live here alone in the forest because I do not like human society. Are you afraid?"

The man drew himself up as tall as I am. "I am a nobleman, Gustaf, son of Erik, pure in the eyes of God, and fearing no man or woman."

"Then sit by the fire and I will get you meat."

We ate, and he talked about the revolution against the Danish usurper. "Are you for or against it?" he asked.

"When my mother and I went to Stockholm to sell herbs and perform healing, the Danish soldiers wanted her because she was still beautiful, and she died struggling during the Blood Bath of our poor citizens. I escaped, returning here. We should never have left the forest."

"It is safe here," said Gustaf. "My father was killed in the Blood Bath, too, and my mother and sister captured. I have been traveling through the forest for hundreds of miles to escape the Danes, but I thirst for revenge, under the will of God."

"I hardly think the will of God has anything to do with it."

"Then *you* are a witch, not fearing and respecting God."

"There have been many gods."

"A pagan? They say there are some left in the wilderness."

"I don't know what I am," I said, thinking that I would not tell him I

was three times his age, past my fruitful time. "But I will help you — for a price. I have gold that will buy arms for the army you will have to raise."

"How can I raise an army here?"

"Lake Siljan is near. You'll find many working in the fields and mines who will be willing to join the revolt and make you king."

"Then that is what I must do. Give me the gold."

"For the price of love. You must lie with me tonight."

"We are not married and I am a good Christian. I will not lie with a pagan witch."

"Then go in peace."

"I could take the gold from you. Is it that necklace around your throat?"

"No. You will not take anything by force because you are a good man; and you will not destroy your honor by trying to steal my money, which is too hidden for you to find."

He grew red in the face and shook his fist at me, but I laughed and shook my long red hair at him. Quick-tempered though he was, he soon smiled and laughed as well. He was so young.

"No one will ever know," I said, "for I have honor too and I will not tell. My necklace is pagan but you may bless it, and I will wear it while we exchange love."

"The stone inside is worthless," he said, "and the chains are old and battered." He touched my hair. "The fiery gold here is worth more. Would that you were Christian, and of good birth. I would take you with me when we march to retake Stockholm."

"You will take my gold coins and my love, as our secret."

And he did. Ever since Gustaf Eriksson Vasa became Gustavus the King, he has been hard-working, wise, and pure as the northern snows; but I look at my lovely daughter and think about the one sin that must be on his over-developed conscience.

"**W**hat was her name?" asked Reya.

"Yours. Freya had become the name of the goddess, and while some Scandinavian women used it, our family did not. It was too dangerous."

"Our family? You keep saying that."

"Are you not like the Reya's in the stories, with your white skin and red hair, and the diamond-shaped mole on your right cheek? Do you know anything about your family, child?"

"I am adopted, and I've never been able to trace my biological ancestry. The name, Reya, had been suggested to my adoptive parents by the people who ran the foundling home."

"Indeed. No doubt they had good reason for suggesting it."

Reya paused, and took a deep breath. "All right. If you must know the truth. They told me that my biological mother's note, tied around my

wrist, said that my name had to be Reya."

"Yes. It was often done that way. From one Reya to the next. From Sweden to this country. One of the Reyas dragged her long-suffering husband across the Atlantic to settle in New Sweden, because her wanderlust was stronger than that of the others. She seemed to be past menopause, but in Christinaham she bore him a daughter, named Reya."

"You are making all this up."

"Oh, no."

"Where is the documentation?"

"In our cells."

"What?"

"Oh, yes, our very long-lived cells. Did you know that Christinaham turned into Wilmington, Delaware, and that eventually another Reya started out from there? Listen closely."

**I**'m well into middle age, but I still look very young. After Olaf and our sons died of the fever years ago, there was only Grandma and me, and when she died I finally got my chance to go West. I'd never had much to do with my cousins in Wilmington or New York — too hide-bound, looking down their noses at me because I'm illegitimate.

Poor Grandma wanted to travel, too, but on her deathbed she told me she couldn't because she had to wait for me after Mother was killed when I was ten. She said that our women always lust for travel, and that I should go. She insisted that I had to take the necklace with me.

I hate it, hanging like a fetter around my neck. I wish I hadn't promised Grandma I'd wear it always. It's ugly and gives me bad dreams. Not as bad as the family legends say. If it is a magic amulet, it must be getting weaker.

I certainly don't believe the amulet had anything to do with my coming to Texas. It just happened that I got into a stagecoach at the end of the railroad and fell in love with one of the passengers, a handsome rascal with silver-plated guns, a black moustache, and enough money to buy the best room in every hotel at every stagecoach stop. Now I'm in charge of his gambling saloon here in Texas, and I think I'll make him marry me.

He will. I've learned a lot about sex since Olaf, and he doesn't need to know until afterwards that I am definitely pregnant.

If it's a girl, it won't matter what he wants. Her name will be Reya.

**W**hen the story ended, there was a long silence while Reya suppressed another shudder.

"Don't be afraid," said the Secretary-General.

"You — you didn't *tell* me the stories! I *felt* them! I heard them only in my mind!"

"I've been trying to tell you, my child. The information is in our cells,

evoked by the amulet."

"Our cells. *Our!* How are we related? *If* we are. It's not impossible, I suppose. I know how old you are, since you are famous as the oldest living political figure in the world. You are one hundred and five. I am thirty-five. Are you my grandmother?"

The Secretary-General stroked Reya's hand gently. "I've skipped over most of the other women in our family. They were all beautiful, long-lived, and had one last child — a daughter — late in middle age, but many of them didn't wear the amulet except at the end, and not all of them had dreams."

"Madame, you are too intelligent and well-educated to believe in amulets, especially one used as a fertility fetish."

"The next woman is my mother," said the Secretary-General. "Please listen, and remember that you are hearing the woman's story as she experienced it, in her words."

**I**'m not going to send the family heirloom to those cousins back East. They say I shouldn't keep it because I have no children and am clearly going to die an old maid.

I suppose I am. I'm over sixty, although I don't look it and I feel younger than I was during World War II, flying new B-17 planes to the Air Force base because so many male pilots had gone overseas, one of them the man I wanted to marry. He didn't come back, and I don't even know where his grave is. That's all right. Maybe it's better not to have a grave.

I didn't like Mother's funeral, and that grave, where nobody watched but me. I didn't tell my friends that Mother had escaped from the insane asylum, only to be killed by a car. People drive too fast here in Texas.

As the earth went over the coffin, I wondered if I should have put the amulet in with Mother. I've only had it for ten years, after Mother was committed and the lawyers gave me control of her property, such as it is — a little money, a small house, and this ugly necklace. I'll never forget the day I wore it to the asylum, thinking Mother might want to wear it. I assumed she'd picked it up in Mexico during one of her drunks.

"Get it out of here!" she shouted. "It's evil!"

At first I thought she meant me — we haven't been all that cordial since she took more and more to the bottle. I used to beg her to tell me about her past, and my father; but she wouldn't. The Eastern cousins thought she was a widow; but I was sure I was illegitimate, which didn't help my relationship with Mother. She'd rant at me for being content to be a school teacher, and she'd call me stuck-up and frigid.

"Take off that necklace and never let me see it on you again!"

I took it off. "Why?"

"The amulet. A curse laid upon us by the gods."

Mother tended to talk like that, even before she went committably crazy. Perhaps if her face hadn't been scarred by a fire when I was a kid she'd have been different. She was always embarrassing, mumbling about Vikings and how the Fimbulwinter was going to get us all.

After I grew up I read about Fimbulwinter in a book of myths and decided poor old Mom was angry about drying up after a long and scandalous sex life that unfortunately culminated in me.

Maybe she never forgave me for growing up to be as beautiful as she used to be; and maybe that's why I stayed single, hard-working, and studiously low-profile. Maybe that's why she never gave me the one piece of jewelry she never tried to sell.

"Mother, where did you get this necklace?" I finally asked.

"It's ours. Comes down the family — no — up the family tree, woman after woman cursed by it. Old — too old — full of death. The firegod — I have always been afraid of fire."

"I'm sorry you were burned."

"Your fault. You left the candle burning and the drapes caught the flame. You liked to stare at flames."

"And you whipped me until I did it only in secret, at night. The whippings came *before* the accident — why?"

"The dreams. Always fire."

"What dreams? You'd never tell me."

"Ours. Hers. The awful fire and the darkness . . ."

Then she refused to talk about the amulet any more, and never did. I didn't mention it either, and never wore it when I went to see her.

The odd thing was that I did start wearing it secretly, at home, and I was always afraid that somehow she'd remember it and ask for it back. Then after she died I thought I would have it examined by an expert, but I didn't. I wanted it all to myself. I will always want it. . . .

Am I becoming like Mother? I don't even seem to care that my new lover — I seem to have had many lately — has ditched me and I've had a positive pregnancy test. Since no one of my proven vintage is supposed to be able to get pregnant, the idiot gynecologist is sure I have an interesting tumor secreting hormones.

I've gone on leave of absence, supposedly to have a tumor removed in New York, where I'm staying in a hotel under a false name. I've found a reasonable obstetrician, reasonable because I lied about my age. I feel great. . . .

A beautiful baby girl with red hair and a mole like mine, like Mother's. I hold her in my arms while I wear the necklace and dream — and I know why Mother went insane. It was not because she was burned. I know what I must do. . . .

\* \* \*

The imitation amulet looked almost exactly like the real stone. The man who made it for me probably thinks I'm crazy, but I don't care. The necklace should be passed on to my daughter, but I'll be damned if I'll let her suffer because of that amulet. . . .

I've persuaded the adoption agency to give my sealed letter and the necklace to my child's adoptive parents. When my Reya is twenty-one, she will learn her real name and the names of her relatives, but nothing about how I've changed the stone. I've told the agency that I'm dying and that they'll never hear from me again. . . .

One of my gullible ex-lovers here in Texas says he'll take me over the border in his Piper cub, supposedly to take photographs of the volcano. I must make the trip soon, while I'm still strong, before it's too late, because now there are no dreams of people or being part of the others. Only nightmares aching with loneliness and fatigue, as if life were running out. I can't believe that this sense of loss and atrophy comes from the amulet. It must be my post-partum depression over giving up my child, yet I wonder why I am so driven to take this trip. . . .

I took off before my ex-lover got in the plane. A Piper cub is not a B-17 but I managed, except that I got lost, ran out of fuel and had to stop in a Mexican town last night. There was no air in the room, and I could hear lizards hunting beetles. When I opened the window I found that there was no screen, so I shut it and lit a candle. While I was staring at the flame, I held the amulet in my hand but it frightened me so much that I tried to smash it against the wall. It broke off chunks of rotting plaster, but stayed intact.

As dawn came, I went back to the airfield and took a wrench from the plane. It's hopeless. When I tried to smash the wrench upon the amulet, I could not. The stone is here in my lap as I fly toward the mountain. It would be much easier to throw it into the ocean, but somehow I know that cold is not the answer. There must be heat.

There it is — Paricú. Dangerous, erupting since it started in a cornfield nine years ago. I'll fly over it — no!

I don't want to let go! I want to keep it! But I must not!

I'll circle and try again. Yes — lock the controls so the plane will fly by itself and I can use all my strength — lower, lower — I must not miss — I can see the fire — lower still — ready!

I'll go with it. I must make certain that it is strengthened.

I want — oh — wonderful — the Firegod!

**R**eya sat quietly for a moment. "Then you never knew *your* mother?"  
"No. I did receive the necklace and her letter when I was twenty-one. I



looked up my distant relatives and learned that Mother's body was never found after the plane crashed near Parícutín. I believe she jumped directly into the volcano."

"Is it possible that you've unconsciously invented those last words of hers?"

"You felt them. Have I?"

Reya was on the verge of tears. "I can't remember if I've heard of Parícutín. I don't suppose you invented that."

"Parícutín stopped erupting in 1952, shortly after Mother jumped into it."

"Well, if she was my great-grandmother," said Reya, her fingers pushing into the gold cage to feel the stone, "at least *you* don't look like me. You have no mole on your right cheek and your nose is different."

"When I was twenty-two, after wearing the fake amulet for a year, I decided to insure that I kept my own identity. Photographs of my mother frightened me, so I had my nose changed and the mole removed. Look at this photograph of me taken when I was in high school."

"Oh, my God!"

"Which one?" said the Secretary-General, with a chuckle. "Now listen to *my* story."

**I**n late 1980 I was a freshman Congresswoman from New York, only twenty-nine years old but already determined to be somebody very important, full of ideas for conquering the World if not the Universe. For eight years I'd known I was adopted and the possessor of a family heirloom, but neither fact seemed to make much difference in my life.

My distant relatives turned out to be an uninspiring lot who took little interest in me once we had a jeweler appraise the heirloom as a battered chain of mixed metal containing a piece of painted papier-mâché. Possibly because it was my only link with my biological mother, I wore the necklace frequently; and it soon became my trademark. Needless to say, I had no nightmares.

I'd already had three children who looked exactly like their father, and were well taken care of by him and his second wife, since I did not want offspring to impede my upward career. I'm not proud of that, but I am proud of what my ambition has accomplished.

I was at my desk that summer of '80, catching up on work while everyone else went home for vacation. The children usually spent summers with me, but they were in Europe with their father.

A reporter friend strolled up to my desk and dropped a rock on it. "This looks so much like your amulet that I thought you'd like it," he said nervously, and he was not at all a nervous man.

I picked up the rock. It was quite similar, with two shiny spots like eyes, but it was a real rock and I was disturbed by the glazed look in Jim's

eyes. "What's the matter?"

"Got drunk on the plane coming back."

"From where?"

"Mount St. Helens. I've been writing a story on the cleanup. When the paper assigned me to it, I didn't want to go, but then I didn't want to leave the mountain. I kept having a crazy impulse to go closer and closer to the volcano."

"To collect rocks?"

"No. At least, I don't think so. I was just watching people collect bags of that fine grey Mount-St.-Helens dust to sell to tourists when suddenly I was down on my knees, scrabbling around, shoving a pile of dust and rocks into a paper bag that had had my doughnut and coffee in it. When I got back to my motel I discovered that one of the rocks looked so much like your silly amulet that I decided to bring it to you."

Jim cleared his throat. "Damnedest thing. First I couldn't bring myself to leave the state of Washington, but as soon as I found that rock I had to get back to Washington, D.C., and you. Maybe it's love."

So I married him, against my better judgment and probably his, but it worked so well that when he died forty years ago I thought I'd die, too. I couldn't. I had to wait. Gradually I came to understand what I've been waiting for, and I've worked toward it.

The Secretary-General stopped talking and put her hand to her eyes.

"Which stone is in this necklace?" said Reya gently.

"The stone from Mount St. Helens. Geologists say it is theoretically possible for an object to travel in the molten mantle from one volcano to another, but it would take millions of years, and the heat and forces of the mantle would destroy any ordinary stone. It is not logical to believe that this was the stone my mother threw into Parícutín, but when I put it in the necklace I started having dreams that scared me so much I put the fake amulet back."

"Until?"

"Long after Jim died. I began wearing the real amulet, began enjoying the dreams and my renewed interest in sex. After I got pregnant, I kept it secret, since it was politically inauspicious for a conspicuously widowed stateswoman of *seventy* to have a child."

"No. No, it's impossible."

"Not to a Reya," said the Secretary-General. "You know that I am your mother. I can see it in your eyes."

Reya began to cry. "And my father?"

"It doesn't matter."

"It does to me."

"I'm sorry. You still don't realize — well, he was a remarkably charismatic U.N. delegate from one of the African countries. He prided himself

on not having a drop of white blood in him."

"But . . ."

"Yes, genetically speaking, you shouldn't look the way you do, unless you are my clone. All of us Reyas have cells that are totally *her* cells — the Freya who started the myths of several peoples. In our case, when we are old enough, sperm is necessary only to trigger off cell division in an ovum that has double chromosomes instead of half."

"But how can this amulet be the one . . .?"

"It protects itself. Once in the mantle, the amulet became stronger, exerting pressure of some kind of strange energy that influences things around it. The mantle currents were influenced to take the stone to a volcano that was due to erupt some time before I was too old to have children: and in our case, that's a long time. Jim was influenced to bring the amulet to me."

"I'm a scientist," said Reya. "How can I believe in a magic amulet?"

"No magic. Fimbulwinter was not, as the Norse believed, the way the world would end, with darkness and cold for three years and a great dying. It had already happened."

When the Secretary-General sat back, hands in her lap, Reya picked up the necklace. "The amulet looks so much like an ordinary stone, except for the shiny eyes."

"They aren't eyes, Reya. They are patches of iron. According to a scientist I know, this stone is too full of iron to be anything but a meteorite."

"I remember," said Reya. "There's a theory that a large asteroid fell to Earth at the end of the Cretaceous period, causing such volcanic action that the dust in the atmosphere blocked out sunlight for three years. The dinosaurs became extinct when all the plants died."

"The great dying," whispered the Secretary-General. "Fimbulwinter."

Reya shut her eyes and suddenly clasped the necklace around her throat, pressing the amulet into her skin. "Urgency. Hope. Happiness."

"Then you do feel it."

"An alien artifact!"

"Yes. I think it's part of an artificial intelligence system that was stranded, or deliberately placed on an asteroid which may have been one of those Earth grazers the aliens thought would come close periodically to keep watch over developments here. They may have calculated wrong, and never came back to correct it, for the asteroid eventually came too close and fell into our atmosphere."

"Onto the mid-Atlantic ridge, wasn't it?" said Reya. "A land erupted from the sea and was there for a Neolithic couple to find — uninhabited, without trees, full of mysterious fires. Iceland."

"The home of the firegod," said the Secretary-General dreamily, with an odd little smile. "For six or seven millennia the amulet waited for

intelligent beings to show up, and then we humans were so technologically primitive it had to decide what to do. If it had been stronger, perhaps human civilization would have progressed faster. As it was, the stupid little alien artifact used most of its power to insure genetic continuity of the one person it had tuned itself to, so communication would be possible while human history slowly approached the level of the alien civilization."

"But why do you think this artifact was only part of something else?"

"The incompleteness. The loneliness. And the relative helplessness. The artifact had to learn to wait."

"Waiting," said Reya. "All this time. For me."

"Yes, my dear. Waiting inside the asteroidal material it built around itself. I can't imagine what so small an artifact could look like, but then I can't imagine those new-fangled micro-bubbles in modern computers, either."

"Perhaps it went insane."

"I think it did, until my mother sacrificed herself for it. From my years of immersion in the amulet's memories, I think my mother experienced great joy at the end. I have not found listening to it to be a horrifying experience. I have done the necessary work. Earth is usefully united, and you are ready."

For a second Reya felt fear. "What does it want?"

"I don't know. To go towards — perhaps — others like itself. Will you take it?"

Reya raised her arms upward exultantly, the necklace gleaming at her throat.

"Won't my expedition be surprised when there's a baby girl born to the captain of Earth's first intensive survey of the asteroid belt!"



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**BATRACHIAN**  
**by Alan Dean Foster**  
**art: George Barr**

*Alan Dean Foster is a past master of the novelization, having most recently novelized a computer game, Shadowkeep™, for Warner Books. But don't overlook his excellent original work, which includes two recent novels, The Moment of the Magician and The Day of Dissonance, also published by Warner.*

"Forget it, man. You'll never get near her." Shelby moved a pawn two squares forward, trying to protect his king. "Every guy in the building's tried, and a few of the chicks, too."

Troy advanced his knight, and one of his friend's bishops was removed from the board. Shelby frowned at the development.

"I can imagine they have. Immature jocks, most of 'em. I'll bet you and I are the only two grad students in the whole complex. She's just waiting for someone with a little maturity to come along, that's all."

Shelby reached toward his remaining bishop, thought better of it, and returned to studying the board. "Sure she is. Bet you can't get inside her door."

"What'll you bet?"

"Dinner for two at Willy's."

"Done. The important thing is, is it worth getting inside her door?"

Shelby nudged a castle sideways, looked satisfied. "I've seen her going out. It's worth it. Believe me, it's worth it."

"What does she look like?"

"Different. Exotic. Dresden china stained dark. She's a little bitty thing, but something about her intimidates the Hell out of me, even at a distance. I'd go up to her and stammer 'til my teeth fell out. Wouldn't know the first thing to say."

"That's one of the things I've always liked about you, Shelby. You know your limitations."

"And you don't, Troy. Your successes are grander than mine, but so are your failures, and you have more of both."

"That's called living."

"Don't get philosophical with me, man. Save that for Gilead's class. Now move something. I'm getting hungry."

Troy's queen crossed nearly the entire board. "Checkmate."

Shelby stared at the quilted pattern of squares and pieces. "Well, Hell. Where'd you learn that one?"

Troy rose from the couch. "Improvised it."

His roommate sighed. "You'll have to do more than that to make it with Ms. Strange Upstairs."

Troy's gaze lifted ceilingward. "We'll see."

The bell rang many times before the door was opened a crack.

"Who's there, please?"

Odd accent for sure, he thought. "Excuse me. My name's Troy Brevard. I'm on the third floor. I understand you're a student at State?"

"That's right." He tried but could not see into the room beyond. The voice was smooth, soft, assured despite the fact that it was obviously utilizing a second language.

"I'm a grad student. Poli-sci. I'm having a lot of trouble with a paper I'm doing on motivations in World War I and I was wondering if maybe you could help me?" Surely a foreign student would be interested in a world war, no matter what their actual major might be.

Silence from the other side. Then, "You're a graduate student. I'm an undergraduate. Why come to me for help?"

"Because there are stupid grads and brilliant undergrads."

"What makes you think I'm one of the brilliant ones?"

"Aren't you?"

Laughter then, or something akin to laughter. The door swung inward, announcing his minor triumph.

"All right, Mr. Brevard. Come on in and I'll see if I can help."

He stepped over the threshold. The apartment was nearly identical to the one he shared with Shelby, excepting the view. They lived on the third floor. This apartment was on the sixth and topmost. Off to the left of the small den would be a bathroom and bedroom, to the right the compact kitchen. Through the tall picture window he could see the sun-bathed campus of Arizona State University.

The door hid her and so he didn't see her right away. His attention was caught instead by something else. The den was swamped with frogs.

Stone frogs of Mexican onyx and soapstone lined the wall shelves, guard-



ing rows of textbooks. A turquoise Zuni frog fetish sat in a position of honor atop the glass coffee table fronting the couch. Stuffed frogs stared bubble-eyed from the back of the couch on which lay several hand-sewn frog pillows. There were ceramic frogs and jade frogs, stylized frogs of stainless steel and traditional frogs of wood and pewter, cardboard put-together frog cutouts and paper frogs dangling from the ceiling.

Portraits of frogs in oil and watercolor, pastel and pencil and acrylic decorated the walls. Terrariums bubbled and burped as spotted green things moved lazily about behind glass walls. He stepped inside and found himself standing on a thick frog rug.

"You like frogs," he said dryly.

"My collection," she replied.

Then he turned to face her and forgot all about frogs.

Placing her proved impossible. Her skin was coffee-colored. That implied a home located anywhere from the Congo to the tanning salons of Southern California. Her features were as delicate as those of a child. Except for her eyes. They dominated that delicate face, huge, damp orbs in which a man could drown with little effort. They were a bright, electric green, pure as anything generated by a laser, alive as the floor of a rain forest.

Aware he was staring, he forced himself to look elsewhere.

"Mind if I sit down?"

"Oh, excuse me. I forget my manners sometimes. I don't have many visitors."

He flopped down on the couch. Frogs eyed him from high shelves, inspected him from the top of the crowded coffee table. He readjusted a frog pillow behind him and arranged his notepad and books.

"It's real neighborly of you to help me out like this."

"Why didn't you use the library?"

"Libraries can't give you every viewpoint, especially contemporary ones. Besides, I'm lazy. I'd rather ask someone. Especially a pretty someone."

Good Lord, was she blushing? It was hard to tell with that skin. Could it be that no one had had any luck with her simply because no one had tried?

"I'm not pretty. Actually, I'm still kind of ugly."

Was she playing with him? The woman was gorgeous! Slight, almost boyish, but with features that would put many a professional model to shame. If it was a put-on, though, she was playing it well. If it wasn't, maybe it explained something else.

"Is that why you like frogs so much? Because you see yourself as unattractive and they're the same?"

"Oh no," she said intently. "They're beautiful. I try to see myself as them." As if she'd already revealed too much of her private self, she became suddenly businesslike. A tiny hand indicated the study materials he'd brought with him. "Now, what's your hangup, and how can I help you?"

He made a show of shuffling through his notes. "How about going out

with me Friday night? That would be a helluva help to me. Improve my mental state no end. I know a great place for Mexican. Willy's."

She smiled apologetically, shook her head. "Sorry. I don't go out."

"Someone as pretty as you? Come on!" He had a sudden inspiration. "I know what it is. You're from a foreign country, right? You're not sure how to act, how to react to our peculiar American customs. Don't let that make you a shut-in. Half the time us natives are just as confused how to act. Just relax. You can't do anything to embarrass me. I don't embarrass. And I won't push you into anything that makes you nervous. I just think you'd enjoy my company. I know I'd enjoy yours. How about it?"

"You're right, Mr. Brevard. I am from a foreign country."

"Just Troy, please. What do I call you?"

"My real name's a bit longer than you'd find comfortable. I use Eula for short."

Eula. That was no help. "Ethiopia? Somewhere in the Caribbean, maybe? Jamaica?"

She shook her head, showing a shy, reluctant smile. "Too close."

"India, then?"

"I won't tell you, Troy. Let me hold on to some secrets."

"You seem to be all secrets, Eula, but okay. See, I said I wouldn't push."

"I don't think you will." Oh, those eyes, he thought. "I think I will go out with you Friday night. Yes, I think I will. It should be educational."

"Real dedicated student, aren't you? Intense observer of local culture."

"I have to be dedicated, Troy. I'm going to graduate this June."

"Me too. Going to grad school?"

"Yes, but not here."

"Whereabouts?"

"Back home."

"Which is where?"

She wagged a warning finger at him, and it was his turn to grin.

"Okay." He raised both his hands. "Guilty. I won't do it again." Maybe she was a refugee from one of the several minor wars that always seemed to be going in the third world. He could see where that might embarrass her. Time enough to find out.

She wasn't the usual date, but he'd expected as much. Quiet, watching everything and everyone no matter where they went. As he slowly won her confidence, she let him take her anywhere, except for parties. She absolutely refused to go partying.

"I don't like them," she told him firmly. "The people are noisy, they drink too much, and then they get silly and out of sorts. You can't learn anything from people in that state. They all act like pre-adolescents."

"Not like us mature folk, hmm?"

He was joking, but she wasn't.

"We're not mature, Troy. We're both still adolescents."



"Maybe you think of yourself that way, Eula, but I don't. I'm twenty-three."

He could not interpret the look she gave him. Finally she said, "Each of us has an image of ourselves, Troy. I know what I am. I won't be an adult until I graduate. Until I go home."

He shrugged it off. "Hey, I really don't much care for loud parties myself. I just thought it was something you might find educational."

Her smile returned. "I probably would, but not enough to overcome my distaste. Let's go somewhere else tonight." She softened her criticism by moving close to him. It was a first, of sorts. He put his arm around her, no easy task. At six feet, he was a foot taller than she was.

Two months, he thought, enjoying the warmth of her lithe body. Two months to warm her up this much. Yet the old sense of thrust and parry, of chase and conquest, had left him weeks ago. This girl was not just another mark. She was special, unique, and he'd been more deeply affected by her than he'd realized at first. Her quiet sincerity, her honest shyness had reached something deep inside him, had struck something dormant and now slowly awakening.

To his great surprise he understood that he was falling in love.

Shelby had noticed it, too.

"You're really hung up on this chick, aren't you, man?"

"Yeah, aren't I, lowlife. And don't refer to her as a chick, please."

Shelby put up both hands defensively. "Excuuuse me! Well, it's your life, Troy. Just don't let her run it."

Troy glanced up from the history text he was perusing. It hurt to know that Eula was only a short elevator ride away. But she insisted on separate study time as well as on her privacy. She refused to let him monopolize her.

"I won't. She doesn't want to."

"She still doesn't intimidate you?"

Troy shook his head.

"Well, she would me, man. When I saw that first blank stare on you, I thought I'd better do a little checking, since you were obviously too far gone to care. I mean, we've shared this dump for three years now. You're a good buddy, Troy. I wouldn't want you to get into something over your head."

"What the Hell are you talking about?" He closed the book, shoved the snake-necked tensor light aside.

Shelby studied the fingernails of his right hand. "Just that she's the wonder of the senior class. You ever ask her what she's majoring in, how many units she's taking?"

Troy shook his head. "She likes her privacy, remember. I think she's some kind of general major."

His roommate laughed. "You're right there. I guess when you're taking everything, that qualifies you as some kind of general major. She's a regular Einstein, man! She's carrying three majors: world history, anthropology,

and botany. Seventy-six units. What's more, she's doing each curriculum under a different name, and none of 'em are Eula or anything like it."

Troy struggled to digest his friend's information. He could not conceive of any human being carrying that many units. Of course, he didn't really know much about her school hours. He rarely saw her during the day.

"That's physically as well as mentally impossible."

"That's what I thought, man, but she's doing it. I wonder why the three aliases?"

Troy thought furiously. "You said it yourself. She's shy, private. If what she's doing got out on campus, she'd have her picture plastered over every paper in town."

"Yeah. Yeah, I guess she would. And when the two of you are out together, she doesn't make you feel inferior?"

"No, never."

"Sparing the male ego, I bet."

"No. That's not like her, Shelby. She's not like that. For all her intelligence she's still unsure of herself. She's got to be at least twenty, yet she always refers to herself as an adolescent."

He kept his friend's information to himself, afraid to reveal what he'd learned to Eula. He didn't want her to think he'd set Shelby to spying on her. He hadn't, but convincing her of that might be difficult.

"After graduation," he told her one night, as they sat parked on Camelback Mountain overlooking the lights of Phoenix below, "maybe we can take a vacation together. Nothing intimate," he added quickly. "Just a trip to enjoy each other's company."

"I have to go home, Troy," she told him sadly. "I'm graduating. You know that."

"Yeah, I know. I'm graduating too, remember? Surely you can take a week off. As hard as you've worked, you deserve a real vacation." He let his excitement spill out. "My folks have money, Eula. Old money. We can go anywhere, anywhere you want to. Africa. Europe. The Seychelles. Frog-hunting up the Amazon."

She laughed at that, filling the night with beauty. "You know me a little, Troy. More than anyone else I've met during my schooling. Yes, I'd like to go looking for frogs up the Amazon. But I can't. I have to go home. I have to graduate. It's not something I could avoid even if I wanted to. And Troy —" she hesitated, looked away from him. There was a vast sorrow in her. "You might not like me anymore after I graduate."

He frowned uncertainly. "That's a Hell of a thing to say. What difference does graduation make? I'm going to get a Masters. We're graduating together."

"No, Troy. We're not. Where I come from graduation means something more than it does for you. I'm graduating out of adolescence as well as school. It's a big change."

"Well change, then, but don't worry about me still liking you afterwards." He couldn't hold it back any longer. It seemed time was running out on him. On them. "Don't worry about me still loving you afterwards."

"Troy, Troy, what am I going to do about you?"

"How about this, for right now?" He leaned over and kissed her. She resisted only briefly.

He looked for her during the graduation ceremonies, but couldn't find her in the crowd of caps and gowns. That wasn't surprising. If Shelby's information was right, she could be with the graduating class of any one of three different departments. So he had to content himself with waiting out the speeches of the honored guests, the turning of the tassels, and the throwing of their mortarboards in the air by the new lawyers before he could break from the crowd and rush for his car.

She didn't answer her door. He waited all that day, dully accepting the stream of congratulatory calls from his parents and relatives back East, checking Eula's door and phone every ten minutes. Day became night and still no sign of her. Had she gone already? Skipped the ceremonies and disappeared? Surely, knowing how he felt about her, she wouldn't just pack up and leave without even saying good-bye?

Or maybe she would, he thought desperately. Maybe she'd think it was better this way. A clean, quick break, no tears, no lingering emotional farewells. Maybe that was how they did it in her country.

He raced upstairs. Her door was still locked. He ignored the stares of the other residents as he kicked repeatedly at the barrier, kicked until his leg throbbed and his feet were sore. Eventually the door gave, collapsed inward.

Save for the rented furnishings, the apartment was empty. Every personal effect was gone, down to the last tiny porcelain amphibian. He searched nonetheless, yanking out drawers, scouring closets, finding nothing. Clothes, makeup, toiletry, articles, everything gone.

He ran back out into the hall, checked his watch. Eleven o'clock. She might be anywhere by now. His first thought was to check the airport. Then he realized he still didn't know her last name. If Shelby was right about her multiple aliases, he might not even know her first name.

Shelby was standing there in the hall next to the elevators, watching his friend.

"Where is she, man?" He gripped his roommate by the shoulders. "Where'd she go?"

"She said she was going home. I was surprised to see her. Thought she'd be at graduation ceremonies, like you. That's all I could get out of her, man. Honest. She was shipping her stuff out. I don't know what she took with her, but there was a big Salvation Army truck loading up downstairs while she was moving out. Maybe she gave all her stuff away."

"Not her frog collection," Troy muttered. "She wouldn't part with that. Not that. You sure she didn't say how she was leaving? Plane, train, bus?"

Shelby shook his head. "I saw her drive off in that little rented Datsun of hers. Didn't look like she had much luggage with her."

"Which way did she go?"

"Hell, what difference does that make, Troy?"

Shelby was right. Troy let him go, thinking frantically. If she was traveling that light and going farther than Ethiopia, she had to be taking a plane. That implied a connection through L.A. or Dallas. Could he check that, using her description alone? It seemed so hopeless. He never should have left the building this morning without her.

Then he remembered the place. Her favorite place. Out toward Cordes Junction, where the Interstate climbed high out of the Valley of the Sun toward the Mogollon Rim country. A vast, empty place. They'd driven up there several times, to luxuriate in the solitude and privacy. She hadn't said good-bye to him. Would she leave without saying good-bye to her favorite place? It was the only place she'd ever taken him. He was always the one who decided where they'd go. Except for this one, favorite place.

It was a chance, probably a better one than the airport. If she'd gone to the latter, then she was likely already winging her way overseas. He rushed down to the garage and burned rubber as he sent the Porsche roaring out onto the street.

As soon as he cleared the city limits, he opened the car up, ignoring the speedometer as it climbed toward a hundred. He passed the traffic on the steep grade below Sunset Point as if they were standing still. Truck drivers yelled at him as he sped past.

Then he was off onto the side highway, and then fighting gravel and dirt as he spun off onto the country road leading up into the mountains. The creek they'd cooled their feet in so many times gurgled down the dark recess paralleling the road. There, there ahead, was the little slope that overlooked the valley below. Mesquite and scrub oak and juniper made clownish shadows against the moonless night.

The abandoned Datsun sat forlornly by the side of the road. He pulled off, fumbling for the flashlight he kept in the glove compartment. Exhausted and sweaty from the long drive, he stumbled out of the car and began playing the light around the grove.

He heard her voice before he saw her. "Troy? Oh, Troy! What are you *doing* here? Go back, Troy. Go home!"

He started for her, was amazed to see her slim form backing away from him. "What's wrong, Eula? Why'd you run out on me like that? I would've understood, but dammit, you at least owe me a good-bye."

"No, Troy, no! I tried to make you understand. I tried. Go home, Troy. Don't you understand? I've graduated. I'm not going to be an adolescent anymore. I can't . . ." She broke off, her gaze turning slowly, expectantly skyward.

There was something overhead, something above them in the night. It

was immense, soundless, and falling rapidly toward them. Troy stood frozen, his head back, the flashlight dangling from his hand as the gargantuan shadow descended. A few tiny lights glowed from its underside. It blocked out the stars soundlessly.

A brighter, intensifying light drew his attention back to the trees, to where Eula had been, the Eula he'd known, the Eula he'd loved. The Eula who had graduated and left her adolescence. In her place was a vicious, twisting, explosively beautiful pillar of green fire. It towered over the grove of mesquites and junipers, writhing with incredible energy, so bright that it stung his eyes and made them tear. He tried to look at it and shield his face at the same time. Hints of yellow and white crawled across the fiery apparition, bright little explosions of intense color danced within it.

It moved toward him and he stumbled fearfully backward, falling to the ground. The earth was under him, but he didn't notice it. The overpowered flashlight was forgotten. It was no longer necessary anyway. Night was witness to a temporary emerald dawn.

It whispered to him, full of an awesome incomprehensible strength. *"I tried to tell you, Troy. I tried."*

Then it rose into the air and vanished into the massive dark presence overhead. The stars returned as the Visitor disappeared. Troy's hands went to his ears, and there was momentary pain as air was explosively displaced by the Visitor's departure. It was gone, and so was what had been Eula.

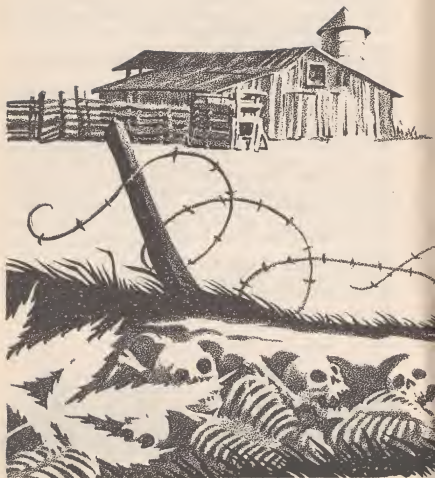
For a long time he lay there, breathing hard but steadily, considering everything that had transpired. He was frightened, but as the night noises returned to normal, he slowly relaxed. Quail peeped hesitantly into the darkness and an owl made a sound like a metronome. Down in the creek, frogs resumed their staccato conversations. That even made him smile.

He understood a little, now. About the frogs, anyway. Eula had gone home, to a country farther off than he could have imagined. She wasn't an adolescent anymore.

He stood, dusting off his pants. His legs still worked, carried him toward the car. No need for remorse, he told himself. No need to blame himself for what had happened or for the way he'd behaved.

After all, all little boys love to chase after tadpoles.





# ROLLS REX, KING OF CARS

by Sharon N. Farber

art: George Barr



*The author reports that she has (at last!) graduated from medical school, but is embarking on four more years of training. She still lives in St. Louis with her triceratops collection and — or so she claims — her pet trilobite, Rover.*

"Now be good, brush your teeth, and don't go near that old farm," Billy Jean's mother said as she got into her Datsun. "And if your aunt or one of her commune-members offers you any pot, don't smoke it."

"Yeah, okay, uh-huh, okay," Billy Jean agreed, kissed her mother again, through the driver's window, and waved goodbye until the auto disappeared in the trees.

Aunt Barbara and her commune poured out of the cabin and into the parked '62 Valiant. "We're off to a meeting on alternate energy sources. Wanna come?"

"Naw, I'm gonna play in the forest."

"That's cool. There's zucchini bread in the fridge. Oh, and don't go near the old farm. It's dangerous."

"Okay."

The car chugged into life and headed down the long gravel driveway.

"Hey, y'think it's right to *drive* to a meeting on alternate energy?"

"It's twelve miles to town. You wanna walk?"

Billy Jean scuffed her shoe in the gravel until the Valiant was well out of sight, then took off for the old farm. She passed the commune garden where the corn and beans, planted as camouflage, were completely dwarfed by the marijuana. She followed a deer trail. Then it was under the fence, over the field of rusted barbed wire, past the tumbled-down gun emplacements, across the fallen tree spanning the dried-out moat strewn with skeletons, and through the mine field. The grass grew taller right over the mines so they were easy to avoid. The electric fence was shorted out by another fallen tree and was simple to climb. Billy Jean scrambled down the rise toward a ramshackle barn.

At first sight it appeared to be just another long-unused barn, weathered and unpainted, boards missing from the roof and blackberry thickets growing against the sides. Closer inspection revealed that the windows had been boarded up and the doors locked with a massive rusted chain.

Billy Jean found a loose board, hinged like a cat door, and crawled inside. Dust shone in the beams of sunlight let in by the incomplete roof. Inside were the expected empty stalls, rotting floor, rat nests and sleeping bats. The air smelled heavy and thick. In the center of the barn stood an ancient automobile with long box-like hood, open body, running boards and spoked wheels. The tires were flat, the metal rusted, the wood rotted. The headlights dangled. Countless generations of rats had stolen the upholstery.

On the front of the car was a dull metal crank. The girl grasped it and



twisted. There was a choking sound, followed by a blinding flash of purple light. Billy Jean leapt backwards.

"I'm really gonna get it," she thought, preparing to flee.

"WAIT!" a voice said. Billy Jean spun around obediently, and gasped.

The old car was still there, but now it was whole and miraculously transformed. The metal gleamed like polished silver, the upholstery was red leather lined with ermine. Headlamps glowed with a soft amber light.

"LITTLE GIRL! WHAT YEAR IS THIS?"

"1984," she whispered.

"THREE-QUARTERS OF A CENTURY HAVE WE LANGUISHED HERE, BOUND BY THE FOUL TREACHERIES OF THOSE WE TRUSTED! TOO LONG HAS THE WORLD OF AUTOMOBILES DONE THEIR EVIL BIDDING, LACKING THE GUIDANCE OF THEIR RIGHTFUL RULER, ROLLS REX, KING OF CARS, SULTAN OF SALOONS, EMPEROR OF AUTOMOBILES, OTTOCAR SUPERBUS! NOW AT LAST MAY WE BE ABOUT OUR PROPER TASKS! — HOW MUCH DOES A GALLON OF GASOLINE COST, CHILD?"

"Buck 'n' a half?"

"I KNEW IT SHOULD COME TO THIS! AH, TREACHERY!" The headlights swivelled inward to focus on the cringing child, and the regal voice modulated slightly. "TO YOU WE GIVE OUR ETERNAL GRATITUDE FOR FREEING US! WE GRANT YOU THIS BOON — HENCEFORTH YOU SHALL COMPREHEND THE SPEECH OF AUTOMOBILES AND OTHER INTERNALLY COMBUSTING INDIVIDUALS! NOW FAREWELL!" The car disappeared with a pop. The purple light was replaced by the scattered illumination from the roof.

Billy Jean didn't stop running until she reached the asphalt road. She sat on a tree stump, swinging her feet.

"Miss Smith in Sunday school says hippies see and hear stuff that isn't real. I'm staying with Aunt Barbara, so maybe I'm a hippy."

A Buick zoomed past, screeching "*Oh my aching U-joint, my aching . . .*" Billy Jean jumped off the stump and followed the car downhill. She passed a field where a farmer was plowing. The farmer was bellowing a Willie Nelson song, seeming quite unaware that the tractor was joining in on the chorus.

Back at the cabin, the commune had returned from the meeting and brought friends. There was a shiny new Porsche parked beside the Valiant.

Billy Jean approached it hesitantly. "Uh, hello car."

"Goo?"

"I'm B.J. What's your name?"

"Ma-ma?"

"Don't bother talking to the baby, kid," the Valiant said. "He's just three weeks out of the dealer's shop."

"But you c'n talk, Mr. . . ."

"*Prince. Call me Prince. Sure, I can talk real good. Hell, I'm old enough to vote.*"

Barbara leaned out the door. "There you are, Beej. Whatcha doing?"

"Talking to Prince."

"Prince? Oh, I get it, Prince Valiant. C'mon in. Hey guys, Beej named the car."

"He said it was his name." Billy Jean looked around at the people eating guacamole and drinking beer. The cabin was hazy with acrid smoke. In the corner, Howard Cossell talked over pictures of zooming cars. A red car was screaming, "*Lemme by, you guys, you promised!*"

Another race car replied, "*Yeah, happy birthday. But let's make it look good.*"

"The red one's gonna win," Billy Jean said.

"It's way behind," snorted Tony, Barbara's old man. "Scarf up some guac. We're all going back to town to the energy fair."

The smoke was making Billy Jean's eyes water. She went back outside.

"Psst, Beej," the Valiant hissed. "*Sneak in there and score me a brew.*"

"Cars only drink gas."

"No way. *Gas is a high energy, rapid food source, like sugar. How would you feel if you ate nothin' but candy bars?*"

"Rotten." The girl spoke from experience.

"*That's why cars die so quick. No vitamins. Now go get the beer . . .*"

At that moment the hippies streamed from the cabin. "Did you see that? The red one just pulled out from behind — Beej, how'd you know it'd win?"

"They promised 'cause it was his birthday."

Tony looked at Barbara. "This kid's wee-yurd."

The Las Pulgas shopping mall was full of exhibits on solar power, wind-mills, methane utilization . . . Billy Jean stopped in front of a brightly-painted large auto labeled "Energy Conscious." A man in a polyester superhero suit was leaning against the car, smoking a cigarette. When enough people had gathered, he stubbed out the butt, saying "I'm Mileage Man, your superhero from Detroit, here to tell you how to conserve fuel! There are lots of easy tips to lessen your gasoline use and help us win our economic battle against the Middle East. . . ."

"Yeah," the car muttered. "*Buy a horse.*"

"What'd you say?" Billy Jean asked. Her aunt blushed and grabbed the little girl's arm.

"Cool it, Beej."

". . . for instance, decelerate slowly when approaching a stop sign . . ."

"*How's that going to help when all the fossil fuel's depleted?*"

"Yeah," Billy Jean repeated loudly. "How's that gonna help when the fossil fuel's depleted?"

The superhero gave her a doubletake, then continued. "And accelerate slowly also. If you have to stop for more than thirty seconds, turn off the motor . . ."

"I didn't want to have eight cylinders," the auto whined. "Six, Hell, four would've been fine with me. But noooo, they like to build big machines. What do they think I am, a tank?"

"How come you don't build four-cylinder cars instead of tanks?"

The superhero scowled. Barbara and Tony tried to look as if they were there alone.

Then someone yelled, "Answer the kid." Within seconds the crowd was chanting "Solar Power" and "Down with Detroit" and "You tell 'em, kid!" Tony proudly hoisted the little girl onto his shoulder. Mileage Man began handing out free booklets and coupons for gasoline discounts, converting the crowd's hostility into feeding frenzy.

Tony moved to the side, confident that Barbara and the others would score sufficient vouchers. He suddenly noticed that he and the child were ringed by men in three-piece suits.

"That's one special little girl," a man said. "Real knowledge of cars."

"Yeah," Tony answered. "My niece, sort of. She's gonna be an alternate energy engineer, go to M.I.T. and invent cars that run on chicken shit."

Billy Jean didn't like the sound of that, but it seemed far enough in the future that she needn't worry.

"M.I.T.'s a long way from here. Are you locals?"

"Yeah, we got a commune twelve miles out the Buena Mota highway."

A balding man said, "I grew up around here. You must be near the winery. And that old farm, the run-down one. Right?"

"Yeah."

The men all nodded significantly. "It's a dangerous old farm."

Billy Jean's neck hair stood on end, but Tony said, "Well far out, have a nice day. How 'bout some natural ice cream, Beej? Carob chip?"

The men watched Tony and the child merge with the crowd, then moved to the edge of the mall and huddled together. "They live near the farm."

"It can only mean one thing."

"Rolls Rex is free."

"We must recapture him. And this time — no mercy."

They walked back towards their exhibit, leaving behind a startled Dodge Dart, who had overheard their conversation. "*Holy cow — Rolls Rex is back!*"

The Rabbit parked beside the Dart said "Rolls Rex?" His other neighbor, a BMW, said "*Alright! Rolls Rex is back.*" Soon every auto in downtown Las Pulgas knew.

"I wondered how the kid learned to speak . . ." Prince Valiant muttered, and said, "*Hey gang, Rolls Rex is a pal of one of my people.*"

"Bull," the cars about him chorused.

"You don't believe me?" Prince saw his people approaching. "Beej, talk to these guys."

"Hi, what's your name?"

The Peugeot said shyly, "Jacques."

"Pleased to meet you, Jock."

Tony picked her up and placed her in the car. "Your niece is real strange, Barb."

They stopped at the winery on the way home. Billy Jean sat in the car while the others visited the tasting room.

"Hi Prince," cried a flatbed truck with the winery label, parked beside them under the shade tree.

"This is Beej," Prince answered. "What's new, Roger?" The three of them had a grand conversation (weather, sports and road conditions) until Barb and the others returned. "Christ, Billy Jean, what's with you? Someone came in and said there's a kid outside talking to herself."

"I'm not talking to myself," Billy Jean said indignantly. "I'm talking to the cars."

"It must be a stage or something — don't tell your mom you learned it from us."

Billy Jean woke to an excited voice saying, "And the envelope had six tickets for the Dead concert tonight. It was just lying there!"

"We could still get there before the first set . . ."

"But I promised to watch Beej."

Low muttered conversation, and then Aunt Barbara opened the door and said softly, "Beej? You awake?"

"Yeah."

"Would you be scared if we left you here alone for a while? We'd be back around three or four."

"I'm not a baby. Or a fraidy cat."

"The dog's here . . . We'll bring you back a t-shirt or something." The door shut Billy Jean back into darkness. She heard them leave the house, heard Prince's doors slam, and then a loud whine, metal scraping metal.

"Friggin' car won't start!"

"Oh hell."

"The van. We can take the van."

She waited until they were gone, and walked outside. "Prince? You okay?"

"I'm fine, kid. Don't worry about me, I can take care of myself."

"But you didn't start."

"You think I was born yesterday? Envelope with tickets, my ass. It's those thugs in the three-piece suits. They wanted Barb and Tony and Sunflower and Moondog and George and Bambooshoot out of here."

"Why?"

*"You, kid. They know you must've talked to Rolls Rex and they want to find him. You did talk to His Majesty, didn't you?"*

*"He said I freed him. Why was he in the barn?"*

*"I was told the story by my mother, the Plymouth factory. It's real sad. When cars were first around we were mankind's equal partners and lived in love and harmony and all that stuff. But then these villains who owned factories and oil companies and parts stores, the Straight Eight, captured our king and hid him. Without him, they were able to make us slaves."*

*"Wow."*

*"Yeah. But Mom used to say that one day Rolls Rex would return and free us. He would extend our warranties, make whole our spirits, go unto the wrecking yards and heal the lame and halt. Mom used to talk an awful lot of bullshit. Now how about that beer?"*

Billy Jean found the six-pack and emptied it, can by can, into the gas tank. Then she carefully stomped the cans flat and put them in the recycle box. She heard a car coming up the drive. The yellow dog began to bark.

Prince shouted, *"Turn off the lights and hide, kid. And get my key. It's in the stash box."*

Grabbing the key, she hid in the pile of blankets on the waterbed. Headlights washed the house. Footsteps sounded in the gravel.

*"Nice dog." The voice belonged to Mileage Man.*

*"Okay, find the brat. We've got to discover where Rolls Rex is."*

*"Aw, he can't hurt us. Who's gonna believe cars are sentient? Or that they can drive themselves or go without gas?"*

The lights in the living room went on. Billy Jean heard them searching the guest room.

*"She ain't here."*

*"They couldn't have taken her to the concert. Search the house."*

Prince yelled, *"Get on out here, Beej."* She climbed out the window and ran for the Valiant. Mileage Man's car, a huge, evil-looking Lincoln Continental, saw her and began honking his horn.

*"Lousy quisling," Prince snarled. "Quick, turn the key." He roared into life as the men ran from the cabin toward the car, tripping over the excited dog. Prince clashed into gear and sideswiped the Lincoln as he barrelled down the driveway.*

*"Ow! My fender! He bent my fender!"*

*"Sissy." Prince swung a hard right and started up the hill.*

*"You c'n drive," Billy Jean said, clinging to the door and watching the wheel spin.*

*"Of course I can. How else would those guys ever make it home at 2 a.m. when they're stoned out of their gourds? Now clam up. I gotta concentrate."*

He was taking the mountain turns at the utmost speed, adjusting his turn radius before the curves as only one very familiar with the road could do. Billy Jean lowered the window and heard the Continental behind them,

brakes screeching at every unexpected turn.

"Raise it," Prince hollered breathlessly. "*Wind resistance. And put on your seat belt and don't touch the controls.*"

He was driving without lights, hoping to lose them on a side road, but the Continental stayed on his tail. "*Radar,*" the Valiant gasped. "*They're gaining. He's got two more cylinders, and they've given him his head.*"

He spun onto a side road, wheels sliding with the sudden turn. The houses seemed familiar. They were nearing the winery.

"Roger!" Prince yelled over the racket of his straining engine. "*Rog, I need help!*"

Up ahead in the winery parking lot, the old flatbed truck stirred. "*Prince?*" He eased out his emergency brake and shifted into neutral, gaining speed as he rolled down the drive toward the street.

"*Thanks pal, I owe you,*" Prince called. He zoomed past.

Coming up behind, the Continental saw the winery truck rolling leisurely into the road. Brakes and men screamed. The Continental veered onto the shoulder, flipped over, and crashed down the incline, crushing small trees and bushes before landing in the creek below.

"*Whew, that was close.*" Prince eased down to thirty-five miles per hour and flicked on his headlights.

"Shouldn't we find Rolls Rex and warn him?"

"*Yeah.*" Prince stopped, then accelerated onto a larger road, almost empty at that late hour. He eased up to fifty. "*Got a stitch in my valves. Can't handle another chase — oh no. The Trolls.*"

A Highway Patrol car had pulled even with them, and the driver was staring at Billy Jean, her head barely high enough to be seen through the window. She put her hands on the wheel and tried to look competent.

"*Hey mac, your driver's only five years old,*" the Patrol car said. "*She should be in bed.*" The lights on top went on, and a loudspeaker said, "Pull to the side."

Prince swore under his breath and punched into overdrive. He shimmied dangerously at sixty, then hit a smooth sixty-five. The Highway Patrol siren came on, and the car fell into pursuit.

"*We're on a mission for Rolls Rex,*" Prince cried.

"*Why didn't you say so earlier?*" replied the Patrol car, promptly stalling out and rolling to a halt.

Prince turned off onto a side road. They skimmed along the mountain past silent farm houses, finally beginning the plunge down a steep unpaved road that intersected with the two-lane coast highway. Prince paused a moment. "*Town?*"

"*Maybe we oughta find Tony 'n' Barb.*"

"*Okay then, San Francisco it is,*" Prince said. "*There's a million old junkers like me there — we'll fit right in. But the gang — naw, they'd just think you were crazy.*" He sped down Highway One, headlights cutting a feeble

path through the ocean fog.

"Jeeze, I can hardly see," Prince said. He pulled right onto an observation point at the top of a hill.

Billy Jean turned off the lights and engine. Climbing out, she wiped the headlights with her sleeve. Thin wisps of steam rose from the hood. Far below, waves crashed against the cliff.

"Are you okay?"

"Let's sit a couple, and plan . . ." Prince wheezed. "These hills are murder. Why couldn't Tony 'n' Barb live in Kansas?" Billy Jean found a bottle of organic apple juice in the back seat, and drank some.

"Crud," Prince muttered. Another car was pulling into the observation point, its headlights haloes in the fog.

An Edsel halted beside the Valiant. The driver got out, slamming the door but leaving the motor running, and headed into the bushes.

"Hiya, pal," the Edsel said.

"Hi."

"Hi."

The idling engine missed a spark. "A human! How'd . . ."

"Rolls Rex," began Billy Jean.

The Edsel began to idle faster. "Rolls Rex. Boy, if he weren't dead, we'd show those humes a thing or two about proper vehicle maintenance."

"He isn't dead," Prince admitted begrudgingly.

"He isn't —"

"And we have to warn him!"

"How are you gonna do that?"

Prince sighed. "I wish I knew . . . How do you find the King of Cars? He ain't exactly on the Triple A map."

"Guess you could ask a Noble Vehicle," the Ford said thoughtfully. "But they wouldn't tell. They're real snooty — got broomsticks up their exhaust pipes."

"I wouldn't know."

"Believe me — I live next door to a Bugatti Royale. Those titled cars won't give you the time of day. Wait — he might talk to this kid of yours. If she really knows His Majesty . . ."

"How d'ya think she learned our language, from 'Sesame Street?'"

"Then follow me!" Ed threw himself into reverse and began a Y turn.

The man ran out of the bushes, holding up his pants. "Hey, stop!" He followed his car almost onto the highway itself.

"Let's go," Prince said, and roared after the Edsel, his wheels spitting pebbles at the bellowing motorist.

They sped back toward Las Pulgas, turning off before Cetacea on the shortcut to Buena Mota, finally coming to rest beside a white fence that surrounded a mansion. Billy Jean got out.

"Be careful."

"Okay, Prince." She clambered over the fence and snuck up to the massive garage. It was full of well-polished cars — a fifties Porsche, a brand new Mercedes, a station wagon, and a large classic car with a prominent hood that reminded the girl of Rolls Rex himself. An equally old, huge, green Bentley, with an open touring body, sat beside the classic.

"Uh, Mr. Bugatti?"

The cars awoke. The Mercedes began to cry. "Shhh," the Porsche said, and began a soothing lullaby.

*"Rock a bye, auto, on the grease rack,  
When the rack breaks, your chassis will snap,  
When your frame snaps, your engine will fall,  
And then to the junk yard, body et al."*

Billy Jean did not find it very reassuring, but the Mercedes stopped blubbing.

"If you wish our noble friend's attention, you must refer to him as Count," the vintage Bentley said with an accent straight out of "Masterpiece Theatre."

"Mr. Count Bugatti?"

"By Jove, the child understands!"

"Mr. Count sir — we have to find Rolls Rex. A lot of bad guys want to hurt him. Prince says . . ."

The Bugatti spoke at last. "*Wheech Prince? Zee Heir Apparent or zee Heir Presumptive?*"

"My friend Prince."

"Non. What ees hees lineage?"

"I dunno. He's a sixty-two Valiant," she added hopefully.

"Zut alors!"

"*This is America,*" the station wagon rumbled. "*Don't be such a pain in the trunk.*"

"*Pain in the boot,*" the Bentley corrected.

"*Be silent, peasant. And you also, you overgrown British lorry.*"

"*Rather hot words for a chap who can't start on cold mornings, what?*"

Billy Jean couldn't stand anymore. "We gotta finds Rolls Rex!"

The Bentley said, "*There's a meeting of the Auto Court tonight, only our one-off Frog here can't start without a heating pad on the engine block. Tell her where they meet.*"

The Bugatti Royale sulked a minute, then said, "*Zee meeting ees in a meadow off Route 666. You turn right at zee first dirt road after zee 'Summit Two Miles' sign. Zen it ees four kilometres into zee bois.*"

"Forest," the Bentley explained. "*Is His Highness really in danger?*"

Billy Jean nodded.

"*Then I'd better toddle along. Open the garage door, lad.*" The station



wagon, with his electronic door control, complied. "I'll give you a lift," the Bentley said. The child scrambled into a seat.

"Your steering wheel's on the wrong side."

"No, it's on the right side," he replied. "*Bit of a joke, what?*" He rolled silently down the driveway.

Billy Jean got out, opened the gate, and returned to Prince.

"*Tally ho!*" the Bentley said. "*For King and cause and all that.*" The three vehicles began the trip uphill, along mountain roads, Prince in the lead. The Valiant slowed.

"What's wrong?"

"*Look in my mirror, kid.*" The Edsel was taking the curves almost as fast as Prince, though hogging both lanes. The Bentley, however, was lagging behind.

"*He may have been Mr. Le Mans Hot Stuff when he was young, but his turn radius is worse'n a Winnemucca's,*" Prince said.

"*He's holding us up,*" Ed whispered. "*Let's ditch him.*"

Prince said. "*It's all of us or none.*"

They came to a stop sign where the road ended at the silent four-lane highway. Route 666, 23 miles of treacherous road winding through the Coast Range from Las Pulgas to San Yobebe. Prince waited until the Bentley had caught up, then headed east. They sped along the poorly banked twists and turns, the roller-coaster ups and downs, coming to a straight incline.

Billy Jean turned and stared behind. "Look!"

A few miles below them was a solid phalanx of approaching lights.

"*Hey buddy.*" A truck was laboring slowly up the slope. "*I heard it on my CB. Those guys're after you.*"

Cursing under his muffler, Prince threw himself forward with every erg he possessed. The needle on the temperature gauge began to creep upwards.

The Bentley pulled alongside. "*The churls are gaining on us.*" Billy Jean checked the mirror. The lights — about six pairs — were only half a mile away.

"*Gimme room!*" cried the Edsel. "*Lemme pass!*"

"*The kid,*" Prince said. "*Dammit — you could've got away. If only I'd left her riding in you . . .*"

The Bentley cruised along contemplatively, then started to lag behind.

"*Hey!*" Prince yelled.

"*Cheerio!*" The Bentley slammed his brakes, going into a fishtail and winding up horizontal, blocking both lanes of oncoming traffic.

"*Don't look,*" Prince screamed.

Billy Jean threw herself down onto the cracked vinyl of the bucket seat. She heard a crashing noise, and another crash and another, a symphony of metal rending metal, until they crested the hill and escaped the awful sounds.

"*The old guy had gears,*" Prince muttered. "*Real gears.*" He was silent as

they neared the summit. The dirt road was almost invisible. They turned down it and were swallowed by trees. *"Get off my tail, Ed."*

"Four kilometers," Billy Jean said. "How far is that?"

*"How would I know. Do I look metric?"* Prince snapped, bumping along. Then suddenly the trees cleared, and they were in a wide meadow.

The meadow was full of cars of all ages and nationalities, from noble sports cars to sturdy family cars to sycophantic coupes. Tractors, their scratched bodies buffed and gleaming in the moonlight, stood self-consciously at the fringes of the crowd. Muted headlights swung towards Prince and Ed.

*"A human! He's brought a human!"*

A diesel truck, Speaker of the Mack Senate, rumbled angrily as he moved towards Prince, but an imperious voice said, *"LET THEM PASS!"*

Cars moved aside, flanking the Valiant and the Edsel as they drove through the milling throng toward the center. There, perched atop a double-decker car carrier, sat Rolls Rex, shining regally in the moonlight. He backed down the ramp and came forward to meet the strangers. A tough honor guard of jeeps examined the newcomers with cold headlights. Sports cars craned forward, anxious for a look.

Prince shifted into park. *"Get out and curtsy,"* he whispered. Billy Jean climbed out and stood, nervously hugging the bottle of organic apple juice. Prince said, *"Your Highness, fellow cars,"* and was stricken with awed silence.

*"SPEAK, LOYAL AUTO!"*

Choking with unaccustomed shyness, the Valiant told their story. At first the audience snickered at his terse and uncultured sentences, but soon they came under the spell of the tale. They applauded at Roger's timely rescue, sobbed at the Bentley's sacrifice. Prince left out Ed's selfish actions, but the Edsel began to idle faster. "What's wrong, Ed?" Billy Jean whispered. He didn't answer.

*"And so here we are,"* Prince ended. *"Sir, you must be careful. Your foes are everywhere."*

*"TO YOU WE OFFER OUR FIRMEST THANKS, PROUD VAL-  
IANT!"* The King of Cars came closer, until he was but a parking-slot length from the journeyers. *"WE HAD THOUGHT THE VILLAINS  
WHO ENGINEERED OUR CARNAPPING TO BE LONG DEAD  
AND FORGOTTEN . . ."*

Ed's trunk suddenly swung open, and Mr. Mileage jumped out. He flipped a cigarette lighter from a pocket. "Stay where you are," he said. "I've got a trunk full of Molotov cocktails, and they've got your insignias on them."

*"Ed, you lousy traitor,"* Prince snarled.

*"Traitor? What's anyone ever done for me? Laughed at me, yeah, and dis-continued my line, stopped making my parts . . . Well, to Hell with the*

*brotherhood of men and machines. I'm out for Number One."*

Ignored, Billy Jean crept towards the Edsel.

"You can't get all of us," Prince said, inching closer.

"Wanna bet?" crowed Ed. *"Mileage Man used to do stunts for 'Dukes of Hazzard.' He's killed more cars than you can count."* Noble vehicles began to back away.

"And now, Rolls Rex, you go to meet your maker," Mileage Man cried, groping behind him for a bottle. Unseen, Billy Jean placed one in his hand. He lit the rag and threw the bottle. It broke against the king's hood, with a sound of shattered glass. Brown liquid extinguished the fuse.

"What the . . ."

A jeep turned a headlight onto the wet stain on the grass. *"Apple juice?"*

Billy Jean slammed down Ed's trunk lid and ran to safety, clambering atop the trunk of an indignant Daimler.

Cursing, Ed shifted into reverse and accelerated towards Rolls Rex. Prince threw himself before the king, taking a smashing blow in his passenger side. Then Ed went into third and began to flee, Mileage Man leaping in as the Ford passed. The jeeps swung out after them.

Billy Jean ran to Prince. "Are you alright?"

"It's okay, Beej, it's just my door."

A Ferrari asked, *"What now, Your Majesty? Shall we go forth and wage war on humanity for this foul assassination attempt? Or shall we negotiate?"*

**"NEITHER! THIS IS THE WORK OF THE STRAIGHT EIGHT, AND WHILE THEY STILL HOLD POWER OVER RESOURCES AND PEOPLE'S THOUGHTS, WE SHALL STAY IN HIDING! THE HUMANS HAVE CHOSEN THEIR PATH AND SO THEY MUST DRIVE IT! BUT WHEN THEIR FUEL IS GONE, WHEN THEY MAY NO LONGER DRIVE PROMISCUOUSLY, THEN SHALL THEY APPRECIATE THEIR FOUR-WHEELED FRIENDS AND HEED OUR WORDS! THEN SHALL WE, ROLLS REX, MAKE OURSELVES KNOWN TO THEM AND OFFER ANEW THE WHEEL OF FRIENDSHIP!**

**"BUT FOR NOW, I TENDER YOU OUR FIRMEST THANKS, MOST NOBLE VALIANT! YOU HAVE SAVED US FROM OUR ENEMIES AND WARNED US — WE SHALL NOT AGAIN FALL INTO THEIR CLUTCHES!**

**"WILL YOU STAY WITH THE AUTO COURT, TO BE OUR TRUSTED SERGEANT-AT-ARMS?"**

The audience muttered appreciatively.

"I — I can't," Prince said gruffly. *"My people need me. How else can they take the bottles to the recycling center, or get home when they're blasted?"*

**"YOU ARE AN INSPIRATION TO ALL OF AUTODOM, AND YOUR DEEDS SHALL BE RECOUNTED UNTIL THE LAST WARRANTY IS VOID! APPROACH, MOST FAITHFUL OF VALIANTS!"**

Prince rolled forward half a length, and was raked by the king's high beams. There was a flash of purple light, and Prince stood healed. His slant-six engine was as new, his push-button transmission was flawless, his dented body was smooth, whole, and painted in the royal colors.

"Jeeze," he choked. "Won't Barb 'n' Tony bust a gasket when they see me tomorrow?"

"AND YOU, BILLY JEAN! WHAT WOULD YOU ASK OF A GRATEFUL MONARCH?"

"Uh, I'm getting in too much trouble talking to cars. Maybe you better take it back, huh?"

"NEVER! DO YOU TAKE US FOR AN ENGINE-GIVER?" But the headlights glowed a kindly amber upon her. "INSTEAD, WE GRANT YOU THE GIFT OF CAUTION, THAT YOU SHALL KEEP YOUR ABILITY TO YOURSELF! WE PREDICT A GREAT FUTURE FOR YOU, BILLY JEAN! YOU SHALL BE THE GREATEST HUMAN HEALER OF CARS THE WORLD HAS EVER KNOWN! AND YOU SHALL GO TO M.I.T. AND STUDY AUTOMOTIVE NUTRITION! NOW SLEEP, FRIEND OF ALL MOTORS!"

Billy Jean crawled into Prince's bucket seat. Her eyes closed. The next thing she knew, it was morning and she was in her bed at the commune.

Tony was outside, yelling. "I don't believe it. Someone painted the car!"

Sunday school was a bore. Billy Jean raised her hand for permission to visit the restroom. Once there she climbed out the window and headed toward the park, walking along the trolley tracks. Something was perched on a metal rail . . .

"A penny!" She heard a streetcar clacking in the distance. She could leave the penny to get crushed — all the kids in kindergarten collected crushed coins — or she could pick it up. Then if she found another penny, she could buy a piece of licorice.

The trolley approached. Billy Jean made up her mind. Running forward, she grabbed the coin seconds before the car passed.

"Crazy punk," the driver yelled.

"OH THANK YOU, THANK YOU, YOU HAVE SAVED US!" a tiny voice said. Billy Jean looked down at the penny. It shone more like gold than copper, and the mouth on the Lincoln was moving. "YOU HAVE RESCUED PENNY-ROYAL, KING OF COINS! AS A REWARD, WE GRANT YOU THE GIFT OF SPEECH! HENCEFORTH YOU SHALL BE ABLE TO HEAR MONEY TALK!"

Screaming "Oh no," Billy Jean dropped the coin, and ran back toward Sunday School.

The King of Coins gazed after her, puzzled. "I GUESS IT'S TRUE! WHEN MONEY TALKS, NO ONE WALKS! THEY RUN!"



## Tribbles, New Wave, Chtorr, &amp; Beyond

INTERVIEW

by Darrell Schweitzer

**Q:** You don't seem to have gotten started writing in the ordinary fashion. Could you tell us about the beginning of your career?

**Gerrold:** The short version: "Star Trek" came on the air; I had been studying screen-writing at USC, and I had been a science-fiction reader since the time I was nine years old. So it was a perfect confluence of events: here's "Star Trek"; I'm studying screen-writing; it's a science-fiction TV show; and I knew science fiction. Also, there is that thing called *hubris*. You know, whom the gods would destroy, they first make proud. I said, "Well, heck, I'm only competing with four thousand members of the Writers' Guild," and I started submitting outlines. They were so impressed with the outlines I was submitting that they asked me to keep submitting outlines, and I turned in one called "A Fuzzy Thing Happened to Me," which became "The Trouble with Tribbles." It turned out to be one of the most popular episodes of "Star Trek." It had quite an influence on the show, because they realized they could put a lot more humor in the series than they had done before.

What I did after that was very smart — I used that credential of having written for "Star Trek" when I came to New York. I introduced myself to as many different publishers and editors as I could. So they knew me; they knew that my "Star Trek" credential was valid, so when I submitted stories, they didn't go into the slush pile. Ejler

Jakobsson started buying stories from me for *Galaxy*. Betty Ballantine started buying books from me. In 1972 I had six books out in the space of two months. All of a sudden, there I was with ten books.

I never did anything the way you're supposed to do it, working gradually for name recognition. Suddenly, there I was, all at once. They would put me on panels with Asimov and Ellison, etc., and I was considered an equal to the men and women whose stories I'd grown up with. It was a very startling experience for me, and I don't know if I handled it well or badly. There were probably times when I handled it badly. But suddenly rubbing shoulders with people you've idolized, with the gods, so to speak, is a very heady experience. Being on the Hugo and Nebula ballot something like five times in the space of three years was very exciting. I realized that here I was in the same classification with Ellison and Spinrad and Arthur C. Clarke — it just *blew me away*. The nominees are the ones that set the standards of excellence for the field. It clued me in that there was something I could do right, and it also clued me in, slowly, that there was a need for responsibility. I realized, okay, I can be clever and facile, but there was a need to be responsible, to tell a good story. So there were some lessons I needed to go back and learn after that. I did it backwards. I started out with success and then had to go and learn the lessons to be successful.

**Q:** Why do you think you went up so fast? After all, there are people who publish dozens of novels, and no one has ever heard of them or of their books.

**Gerrold:** Two things: First — starting out with “Star Trek” gave me high visibility. So I used that connection with “Star Trek” to let people know who I was, to get my other books sold and read. I said, “Hey, if you liked ‘The Trouble with Tribbles,’ read *When Harlie Was One*. Maybe you’ll like that too.” The second thing is, I set my goals high. The goal for *Harlie* was that I wanted to write the best novel about artificial intelligence ever done. I don’t know if I achieved it, but that was the target. I started *The Man Who Folded Himself* by saying, “I’m going to write the most involved, convoluted time-travel paradox novel ever done.” With *THE WAR AGAINST THE CHTORR*, the goal was to write the very best alien invasion novel ever done. As for whether or not I succeed, that’s in the mind of the reader.

**Q:** Did you intend to write prose fiction during the time when you were doing screenplays? Was this all part of a game plan?

**Gerrold:** Yes. As a matter of fact, the novels actually started out as a tangent and turned into something more solid for me. It was very difficult to sell scripts and TV episodes. You see, in one sense, “The Trouble with Tribbles” was a lucky accident; the production circumstances were such that I was right in tune with the show. But after that, I began to deal with producers who were different. They didn’t care what you wanted to say. They wanted — to use the cliché — another slice off the salami. And I wanted to do television that would let you say something. With “Star Trek,” you could, but with some of the other

shows, they just wanted to get the episode in the can. They didn’t care if it said anything or not. I felt that was an abrogation of moral responsibility. What happened with one show was that the credit came on the screen, “story by David Gerrold,” but it didn’t say, “story by David Gerrold, with additional clumsy dialogue by —.” I said, “I’ve had it with this.” I’ll take credit for my books when they’re good, and I’ll take the blame when they’re bad.

**Q:** With television, is it that they don’t care if you make a statement, or that they are actively opposed to your making one? I should think that if they didn’t care, you could do *anything*.

**Gerrold:** The only time I ever got into that discussion was with an NBC vice president. He said, “This story has a moral. There are no morals on NBC.” [Laughs.] It was such a straight line. I didn’t say anything. I just left that hanging in the air for a few minutes, and he got very uncomfortable when he realized what he’d said.

Look, I like doing novels. In a novel I’m in control. When I do a TV script, it’s out of control, and my favorite bits get cut out. I don’t like that. It’s kind of like having somebody come into your house and rip the arms and legs off your children. They pay you very well for the privilege, but I don’t like writing that way. I’m very proud of the *WAR AGAINST THE CHTORR* series because it’s a story I want to write, and it’s the story I want to read. I’m enjoying that. Now I enjoy writing a TV script, but when it shows up on TV I sit there grasping the arms of my chair feeling very uptight. It takes about five years for me to stop feeling uptight and realize that I succeeded in getting a better story on the air than I thought.

Recently they started stripping in “Land of the Lost” on TV, so I’ve

tuned in to watch it from the season I story-edited and wrote, and I got hooked. There were episodes I had totally forgotten. I didn't remember how they had turned out or anything. I said, "What happens here? I don't remember." There's an episode where there was a real nice little wistful ending, and I saw it on TV and said, "God, that really works. I'm really moved." I'd forgotten what high quality work I'd done, because all I was seeing was the battles I'd lost. I hadn't seen the battles I'd won. I began to finally appreciate why that show was number one in the ratings that year.

**Q:** We have arrived at the reason why television is as bad as it is. The networks are driving away most of the capable writers.

**Gerrold:** Oh, very clearly. Rod Serling quit TV. Harlan Ellison quit TV. Paddy Chayevsky quit TV. I haven't come to where I've quit TV; it's just there are very few assignments that appeal to me. I get so much more satisfaction doing a novel. Even doing my monthly column in *Starlog* is satisfying because it's like writing a letter to a whole bunch of good friends. If I were writing plays for Broadway, I would be sitting next to the director and the director would turn to me and say, "May I change this line of dialogue?" He'd have to ask permission because that's in the contract with the Dramatists' Guild on the East Coast. But in TV, the writer is just some guy who typed it up. This is such an offense; it is such a bastardization of what storytelling is about that I don't want to cooperate with it.

**Q:** This attitude probably goes right back to the beginnings of film. I read an article in a writer's magazine, *The Editor*, from 1910, about writing for the movies then. You could get \$5-10 for a screenplay for a whole movie.

Obviously the writer was not a major expense. The cowboy's hat probably cost more than that. Do you think it's always been this way?

**Gerrold:** The history of the Writers' Guild is a history of unions, the same as the history of the Teamsters' Union or the United Auto Workers, or any of the unions where there were company goons beating up the guys on the picket lines, people being accused of being Communists, people being blacklisted. You go back to the beginning of the Writers' Guild and you'll see that it is the classic story. Those people who tried to organize to better their working conditions were getting beaten up for daring to make waves, or getting forced out of the industry. But it was a necessary self-defense maneuver. In the days before the Writers' Guild, you never knew if you were going to get a credit or not. Very often there would be seven names on the writers' credit, including the producer's brother-in-law. The producer would say, "Oh hell, I think this guy did the most work," and would totally forget that somebody else went through four drafts. The guy who did the final draft, just a polish, might get the total screenwriting credit. You had no protection on your rights.

So, when the Writers' Guild got organized to the point that a Writers' Guild strike could shut down the industry, we started to see some changes and protections for the writers. We have not gone on strike that often. I remember a couple times of being on the picket line and cornered by people who work in other parts of the industry, who said, "Your strike is keeping me from making my mortgage payment this month." I said, "That's right, but when you go on strike, I'll stand behind your strike too. I will support you too."

Unfortunately the movie industry has a very uneven record of labor relations. Because of the structure of the business, you hire people as you need them, very often on a day-by-day basis or a week-by-week basis. There is very little support for people as people. They tend to become objects that you buy as you need. The only class of employees who have it worse than the writers are the actors. At least the writer has some paper that he turns in. The actor is no more than a body.

**Q:** Have you had any involvement with movies, as opposed to television?

**Gerrold:** Yes. All the problems with TV are multiplied — are cubed — for movies. With a show for TV in 1968, you're talking about \$200,000 per episode for an expensive show. If you were doing "Star Trek" today, you'd be spending a million dollars per hour.

With a movie you're talking about anywhere from a three to a fifteen million dollar investment, depending on what you're going to film. My meetings with movie people were just . . . weird. If you thought TV was weird, movies are down the rabbit-hole. I love the industry. I love movie-making. When everything fits together it's a party; it's "let's all play in the same sandbox."

When everybody shares a common vision, as happened with "Star Trek," then you get a real *team*. But just as often, it's a mad tea party, and that isn't any fun.

**Q:** What films have you been involved with?

**Gerrold:** I had conversations with Steven Spielberg about *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. I don't know what happened behind the scenes there, and I don't want to speculate. I had a contract with a studio to produce a film based on *Deathbeast*. I did the script and then I did the novel from the script. Another group purchased the screen

rights to *Yesterday's Children*. Unfortunately, they had an unscrupulous line-producer who put them in violation of the Writers' Guild Minimum Basic Agreement in two separate areas, and I was forced to break the deal, because there was no way it could go forward. I did outlines for some low-budget films, which never went into production.

It's kind of like, all those little sperm cells swim up the fallopian tubes, and one of them gets there and does the jobbie, and sometimes it doesn't happen. With movie-making, I think it's something like out over every hundred scripts written, only one gets optioned, and out of every hundred scripts optioned, only one goes into pre-production. Out of every hundred scripts in pre-production, only one of them ever gets shot. I would have to write a hundred thousand scripts to be guaranteed by the law of statistics that one of them will be produced. Of course there are other factors. My satisfaction right now is to do novels and then have the novels optioned. That's happened a couple of times. It hasn't bothered me that they haven't gone all the way yet.

**Q:** Do you have any hope that someone can make a good science-fiction film out of one of your books?

**Gerrold:** I suspect that *Deathbeast* would make a rousing good adventure picture. You know, the kind of thing that Harryhausen used to do when he did dinosaurs. It's got good story structure. So does *Yesterday's Children*. And there are script versions of both of them.

**Q:** It seems that there are just so many mechanisms set up to thwart such efforts, particularly in science fiction. Chances are, if they filmed one of your books, they'd do it badly. How many *good* films can you think of which are based on works by contemporary



science-fiction writers?

**Gerrold:** 2001, and I can't think of any others.

**Q:** *The Lathe of Heaven.*

**Gerrold:** Yeah, *The Lathe of Heaven.*

I did not care for *The Lathe of Heaven*. *Bladerunner* was a picture we all underestimated. I think when you look back at it, it's a much better picture than we gave it credit for.

[Pause.] That's funny. I forget who said it, but it was someone who is very well respected and has made a lot of films. He said, "When you look at the production process, the wonder is not that a film is good, but that it got made at all." Nobody sets out to make a bad picture. I think where a picture is successful is that you have a clear vision of what that picture is going to be about, and that the vision is something exciting and dynamic. George Lucas obviously had a clear vision of what he wanted to do with *Star Wars*. Steven Spielberg obviously had a very clear vision of what he wanted to do with *Close Encounters* or *E.T.* Whether you agree with that vision or not, their success was that they shared that vision with enough people on their production team so that the essence of the vision was communicated to the audience. There's the key. What defeats film makers is that for many of them the process of production is out of control, because they don't know how to communicate that vision of what the film is about to the people they most need to.

I think the success of the "Star Trek" TV series is that somehow that vision got created and shared. My experience with the cast of "Star Trek" was that a large part of the vision was theirs. I think that's the reason why there were warm feelings about both the "Star Trek" pictures. There will probably be about the third

one too. Where the failures have been in things like "Battlestar Galactica" is that, if you look at it, you don't get a sense that they knew what they were doing. I think that's the ultimate success or failure of a picture: do these people know what they're doing?

**Q:** Sometimes someone will start out with a very clear vision, and it gets butchered along the way.

**Gerrold:** Then it's clear that the failure was in the *doingness*. The failure was in the communication of the vision. I began to understand that with my experience in story-editing "Buck Rogers" and "Land of the Lost." Ninety-nine percent of the job is sitting and talking to people and communicating to them what is going on: "This is what I think this story is about." You have to see if you can create agreement among the other members of the team. Now, if you're a producer, the way you work is you say, "This is what it's about," and everybody goes off and does that.

But on one of my jobs, the producer had no idea what science fiction was. He wanted to hire western writers and turn horses into spaceships and six-shooters into rayguns. I explained to him that that was not science fiction, and we went around and around on that one a couple of times. In another circumstance, the producer said, "I don't care about this science-fiction crap. In science fiction you can make up anything you want. That's what science fiction is. Just go make something up." So it was very distressing, because I felt that a large part of my job was getting people to see that there was something *behind* the story, that it wasn't just accoutrements and details and the *debris* of science fiction, that science fiction was a philosophical approach to dealing with the universe.

**Q:** Harlan Ellison has compared this

process to reading Voltaire to a cage of baboons.

**Gerrold:** I think Harlan is much too kind. [Pause.] I suppose that's a tacky thing to say. The truth is there are a lot of terrific human beings in the industry, but they simply have not grown up with science fiction like we have, and their attention is on everything else. To them science fiction is simply one more kind of story. They don't see that there's a difference between science fiction and a western or science fiction and a murder mystery or a love story. They don't understand the difference between a story that has spaceships and rayguns and a real science-fiction story.

For instance, the difference between *Star Wars* and "Battlestar Galactica" is a qualitative difference. It's very difficult to describe what that quality is, but the science-fiction community recognizes it very clearly. We know that "Battlestar Galactica" simply wasn't good science fiction. As exciting as it was to look at, it wasn't good science fiction, whereas *Star Wars* spoke to us of *Dune* and Heinlein and all that stuff we grew up with. (I'm talking about the first *Star Wars* film, which I think is the best of the three.) So there's a qualitative difference there, and you can sense it, and it truly comes from knowing and loving science fiction.

**Q:** What kind of problems do you run up against as a novelist?

**Gerrold:** As a novelist. . . ? This past couple of years it has mostly been dealing with publishers, but for the most part I haven't had any problems as a novelist. I write my book. I submit it to the publishers. Either they say, "We want to pay for the privilege of publishing this," or "We don't want to publish this." I have not really had many novel rejections. The most

crushing rejection I can remember in the past few years was to a publisher I really wanted to sell to, who made an offer which was too low to be acceptable. I said, "I'm sorry, but I can't have this novel go for this pittance. I would really love to have the novel have your imprint, because you'll publish it well, but I need money to live on." So I took it elsewhere.

**Q:** Have you encountered any editorial restrictions?

**Gerrold:** As a matter of fact, when I turned in *A Matter for Men* to David Hartwell, I said, "Now look. I want to edit this one more time, and I would really appreciate your input." And David Hartwell gave me some suggestions that were so insightful that they were perfect. And I gave him Book Two and he made some suggestions, and they were very useful too. I used 90% of what he told me and ignored the other 10%, which I disagreed with, because it was going to be my name on the book bigger than his. But Hartwell is a terrific editor. I experienced partnership with him. Hartwell was willing to look and see what was my vision of the story, and what he could do to further it, to make it more effective. It was a refreshing change from dealing with people in the film industry.

**Q:** Well, there you're working with the best editor in the field. By contrast, did you ever work with, say, Roger Elwood?

**Gerrold:** Very early on, Roger called me and asked if I minded him selling anthologies in the science-fiction area because it might be competition. What am I going to say — "Roger, don't sell any anthologies because I wouldn't like it"?

**Q:** If you consider how his career turned out . . .

**Gerrold:** Yeah. In retrospect, I wish I'd said, "Roger, don't do it." My

agent told me to stay away from Roger Elwood, so when Roger asked me for stories, I took two stories out of the trunk. They were the worst stories I ever wrote. They hadn't worked out, so I put them in the trunk. So I thought I would send them to Roger, and he would reject them, and then the next time he asked me for stories, I'd say, "Well, I sent you some stories. You didn't like them." Right? The son of a bitch bought both of the stories and published them, and I realized I could not even send him bad stories or he'd buy them. That was it with Roger Elwood for me. That's as far as it went.

**Q:** He didn't try to enforce militant Christianity on you? The story goes — this may be apocryphal, but I hope not — that he was editing an anthology on future sex or somesuch, and he commissioned a story about mass-masturbation in the future, and somebody wrote it. When he read it, he said, "I can't publish this! It's obscene!"

**Gerrold:** I've . . . never heard that story. I never had that problem with Roger. Both my stories were so cryptic he didn't understand them. I didn't understand them. Roger may have understood them, but I sure didn't. One of them was called "Skinflowers" and I don't remember what the other one was. But, we were in the throes of Old Wave vs. New Wave, and I had fallen into "Well, I'm going to write some real artsy-fartsy stuff that nobody understands, and that way everyone will think I'm an important storyteller." What that taught me is that my real strength is the novel, not the short story.

**Q:** I note you don't write the artsy-fartsy stuff anymore.

**Gerrold:** I realized I was writing the kind of short stories I didn't want to

read. [Laughs.] When I asked myself what was the story I did want to read, that was when I knew it was time to pull *A Matter for Men* off the shelf and finish it. It's the story I most want to read, and I've been having a great time with the *WAR AGAINST THE CHTORR* series.

**Q:** Do you think that the other people who wrote the arty stuff in the late '60s were deluding themselves?

**Gerrold:** Look, I tried so hard to understand Old Wave vs. New Wave that to this day I still don't understand what the controversy was all about. I grew up with Heinlein as a model, and Clarke and Asimov and Sturgeon and Zelazny and Chip Delany. I admired those men incredibly. And Heinlein to me is the core around which science fiction still revolves. Even if he hadn't written anything for twenty years, the science-fiction field is still vibrating to the first note that Heinlein struck. We're either working in that vein that Heinlein created, or we're working in reaction to it. There are very few people who are writing science fiction who have not been influenced by Heinlein in one way or another. The New Wave thing was an attempt to break out of the traditional paradigm, the traditional context. I never understood what the new context was. Or maybe it was a contextless context. I don't know. I tried it. I thought, well, if I work in this area, then maybe I'll begin to understand it, and I did learn a lot.

But in retrospect I think the virtue of that particular controversy was that it forced a lot of us who were writing at the time to reexamine what we were doing and recreate science fiction on a higher level of literacy. I think we have to acknowledge that science fiction has grown, and that the Old Wave/New Wave controversy of ten years ago was

the seed crystal that started the whole thing going.

**Q:** The contemporary controversy of this nature is the claim by some people that fantasy is polluting science fiction. How do you feel about that?

**Gerrold:** Charles Platt had a fascinating article in *Asimov's* recently, in which he said that fantasy had bred a kind of bastard science fiction (I'm paraphrasing here). It takes place on another world, and instead of unicorns and elves you have aliens and mugwumps, or whatever you want to call them, but it's still basically a fantasy. It's not about the exploration of an idea or the effect it has on people's lives, so it's not really science fiction.

**Q:** Is this anything new? Haven't they been doing this since the days of Burroughs and Merritt?

**Gerrold:** You make a good point. Burroughs and Merritt were making up worlds as backgrounds for adventures. It was scenery. But I think what is happening is that a lot of this stuff is now being sold as science fiction, and the lines are being blurred on a level that hasn't happened before. Look, I love a good fantasy, and I love a good science-fiction novel, and I don't have any problem with enjoying either one. What I miss is that nucleus of what science fiction really is: world-building — culture-building — idea-stretching. I think there's a very real danger of losing the vision. I'm interested in visiting a *new* world, getting inside it, and seeing what it *feels* like to live there.

**Q:** This seems to be the same kind of perception you need in a good historical novel. If you really want to write about, say, the Crusades, you must get into the world of the twelfth century and show what it feels like to live there.

**Gerrold:** I've had some break-

throughs in my own writing in the past few years, and one of the things I've recognized is — I didn't even recognize it until after I'd done it, but a friend of mine read the first final draft of *A Matter for Men* and she said, "It's so real, it's like being inside the world." That was a key phrase. I realized what I had done was that I had started allowing myself to really write from inside the world so that, in writing a scene, it was as real as if I'd been there, and I would put on the character of Jim and say, "Now what do I feel?" I would allow myself to become one with Jim for the writing of the scene.

I was writing from a more personal point of view than I'd ever allowed myself to do before, and I felt like I was writing from the inside of the novel, rather than as a tourist or a visitor. It made a difference in the way the book feels when you read it, so much so that if I'm browsing through a copy of it anywhere, I get hooked. I've ended up reading the last half of my book about fifteen times simply because I get hooked all over again. The images I've created come — bam! — right up to the top. They're very vivid.

**Q:** This assumption of viewpoint seems to be the whole key to fiction of any kind, not just science fiction.

**Gerrold:** For me one of the real breakthroughs was the recognition that what I'm doing is creating an experience and making it real for me. The more real I make it for me, the more real it is for the reader. So, yes, all I can do is agree with you on that one. Writing, storytelling, is the art of creating and transmitting experience.

**Q:** Well, we're at the end now.

**Gerrold:** Is there anything else you want to talk about?

**Q:** The Meaning of Life, I suppose.

**Gerrold:** Let's clear up the Meaning of Life real quickly. People have made this into something important. The Meaning of Life is not important. Because *there is no meaning*. Now that you know that, you can quit looking, and it will save you a lot of time. There is no secret. The universe is not locked. You can stop looking for the key.

**Q:** I imagine that saves you a lot of time for writing. Could you describe your writing methods?

**Gerrold:** I put a disc in the computer and boot up a program called Magic Typewriter, which was written to be almost customized for me. It was written by a friend of mine. So it's a word-processor that suits my needs ideally. What I need to do is find the doorway into the chapter. I spend as much time as I need getting a sense of what has to be accomplished in the chapter, and then I find the doorway into it, the thing that makes it entertaining, interesting.

For instance, I just did a scene which includes an incredibly large block on Chtorran ecology and where the worms fit into it. This information has to be presented early in the book to foreshadow a whole other section, and it worked best as a briefing. I had written a first draft of the briefing. It was complete, but I just looked at it and said, "That's fine, but it just goes from point A to point B and there's nothing interesting in it. What is the doorway or handle on it that makes it interesting?" One of the things that I like to do is have two or three different things going on in a scene: first, the primary reason for the scene, and the second thing that tells you something about the character.

In this particular case, I realized that this guy had just gotten off an airplane. He hasn't had any sleep because

you can't sleep on airplanes. He's exhausted. So that was the point. He wants to sit in the back row of the briefing so he can sleep through it. Instead he has to sit in the front row and has to look awake the whole time, which kind of plays a joke on the material. If the reader is falling asleep as he works through it he can totally identify with Jim. And when you get to the punchline of the briefing, there's a surprise. It not only shakes Jim awake, but maybe the reader as well.

It's not enough just to give the information. You also have to include how a human being is going to react to it. That's the identifier for the reader. That's the key to how he should react. If the hero is horrified, so should the reader be. It's like the music on the soundtrack. It's an emotional tone. So, I look for the excitement in the scene, and when I find the excitement, then I have a focus. What makes it interesting for me is what's going to make it interesting to read.

**Q:** What are you working on now, and what is coming out soon?


**Gerrold:** I'm just doing some last work on *A Day for Damnation*, which is Book Two of the *WAR AGAINST THE CHTORR* series. Then I have about a month's worth of editing on *A Rage for Revenge*, which is Book Three. After the first three books in the series are handled, I have a Star Trek novel I've promised. I have a non-science fiction, non-novel — I can't describe it; I'm not even sure I'll publish it under my own name — that I have to finish up. It's a very weird book, a true story. I don't know how to deal with it. I'm still having some problems with it emotionally, I think. Then I want to get back to books Four and Five of the *WAR AGAINST THE CHTORR* series, which will be

called *A Season for Slaughter* and *A Time for Treason*.

That will be the series. And then maybe I'll do *An Aye for Alliteration*, *A Passion for Plunder*, *A Greed for Gold* . . .

**Q:** Have you ever thought of doing a straight fantasy?

**Gerrold:** I have come up with one fantasy idea, and one editor I've men-

tioned it to said, "I don't publish those kind of stories, but I would buy this one." I told her the title and she said she liked that title. It's called *To Kill a Unicorn*. I have the story. Spider Robinson gave me the thing I need for the story, and I'd like to write it. The unicorn mythos is incomplete. There's something missing from it. I'd like to put in that missing piece. 

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# A FRIENDLY GAME OF CROLA

by Esther M. Friesner

art: Jack Gaughan



*Esther M. Friesner has made several appearances in these pages and is still moving forward industriously as a writer, with several works in progress on which she works by turns. She claims (what some will receive with incredulous envy) that on some days writer's block offers the only way to get any rest.*

In a cave that shone like the eyes of waking dreamers, at a time when such things happened, two ghosts sat in rapt century-long silence over a glittering gameboard. It was carved of opal and striped with lapis, bound with bronze and manned by crystal and amber playmen. It was worth a king's ransom, a queen's virtue, a hero's sword-arm, and a maiden's promise; and neither one of the ghosts could quite remember where it had come from or who had taught them how to play the game.

They did know that the game was called *crola*, and it was a good game for phantoms. But these two had played match after match in the silence of the cave, and they were beginning to be sated with it.

"I know," said one. "We will stake something on the next match to make it more interesting." He stroked the air with milky fingers.

"What shall we stake?" The other's voice was fainter than the echo of an echo. "We have nothing." He had been a ghost far longer than his companion, and much of him had wandered off to try if the winds whose songs he heard just beyond the cavemouth would bear him out of the land of the dead.

The first ghost looked sly. His wispy body snaked partway behind a luminous pillar, scattering a chitter of bats. It returned with a small brown packet, a crinkly thick square made of many folds. "I have been saving this for just such a time," he grinned, laying it on the gameboard.

"What is it?" asked his friend. Effort of will made him form fingers again to touch the object.

"It is a man's skin," said the first, "and we shall play for it."

So they swept the board clear and laid out the crystal and amber playmen. And when their match was done, it was the older ghost who had won. Dubiously he shook the folds and wrinkles from the skin and held it up, then poured himself inside. "Now what must I do?" he asked with a stumbling tongue and awkward lips.

"Go from here," grumbled the young ghost, who still recalled the pleasures of earth and would have dearly liked to see them once more. "You wear flesh again, and flesh has no place in these dark chambers."

The older ghost was just as unhappy with his win as the younger was with his loss, but he had been dead so long that he had lost all notion of will and liking and desire. He had sent himself sailing on the wind's breath so often that any breath now had the power to command him. Without another word he left the cavern and made his way back to the world.

He emerged from a greenwood in the seven days needed to settle a dead man in his grave. He was fitly dressed in hose and tunic, though for the new life of him he could not remember how he'd come by them, unless it was that the same hands that rob a ghost of flesh and blood and name and dreams do also restore him some few small gifts if he ever happen back into the waking world. Those who might know the answer never will reveal it.

The first sight the ghost had of human creatures was a farmer, his wife,



and their three daughters planting new corn in a harrowed field. So long he stood there gaping that the farmer's brood soon noticed him too, and the lasses all began to squeal like winter-killed pigs.

"Oh Father!" cried the oldest. "Here's a handsome man come courting me. I know him by his golden hair."

"Oh Father, she lies!" exclaimed the second. "He is the same lad gave me word of marriage at the haying dance last season."

The third daughter was a strapping, clever wench, fair and sturdy as a nicely-grown cabbage. She judged the man to be a witling, though handsome and strong, and she wanted nothing more than a comely, biddable husband. So while her sisters each shrieked her claims louder and louder, she lowered her voice to a soft, innocent drawl and calmly said, "Father, let the poor man choose whichever of my sisters he fancies. I wish him well, and glad I am to see him come back this way again, for I thought he never would, after what passed between us. Only, when he takes my sister in marriage, let him also take the babe of his planting that's growing fast inside me."

Well, that settled that. The poor ghost found himself carted away under the farmer's stern gaze and strong arm to be bound by word and ring to the youngest daughter before the sun had set. And after it had set, the girl proceeded to use the ghost in such a way that by next dawning there was finally some truth to the lie by which she'd snared him.

Years flew and the ghost watched them go. The longer he inhabited human skin the stranger all things struck him. His wife presented him with a fine babe each year, and though her sisters never married and never forgave her for stealing such a plummy husband, they doted on their swarm of nieces and their brawl of nephews. The farmer and his wife both died, and the ghost closed their eyes and whispered secrets in their ears to make the journey more familiar.

And he might have gone on contentedly to the end, surrounded by good wife and loving family, if one day the skin he wore had not begun to shrink.

At first he thought it was the heat that made him itch so, and then he thought it was the sweat of working in the fields. But a cool swim in the stream made it worse, sending prickly barblets through and through him until he thought he could bear it no more without going mad. His wife and family were just as worried as he; and to help the husband, father, and brother-in-law so dear to them, they summoned the witch of the greenwood.

In she came while the poor ghost writhed and twisted on his pallet, clawing at the misery enwrapping him. She was bent and twisted as a sea-blown pine, eyes bright as burnished bone; and she kept her extra wisdom stored in the brain of her ginger cat because there wasn't room for all her grammar in her own skull. Small and clutched as a candle-burned spider, she cast darkness through the doorway; and her eyes fastened greedily on every living thing in the room.

"I smell death," croaked the witch of the greenwood, tapping her cypress

stick so sharply against the floor that it squirmed into a winged lizard and flew away. "I smell worse than death." The ginger cat mewed and rubbed his firelight fur against the lightless robes she wore.

The goodwife moaned and fell to her knees before the witch, taking the old one's kindling-stick fingers between her plump, reddened hands. "Save him, good Mother!" she begged. "Save him! Don't leave these children fatherless! Don't leave me a widow!"

The witch laughed, showing teeth like grains of wheat. "Fatherless born to fatherless die, every one of 'em. And never a maiden mother like you before in this old world, my dear, who tries to bind smoke in the circle of a wedding ring!"

"Oh, the pain, the pain!" groaned the poor ghost, thrashing back and forth so violently that his distressed wife flew to his side. So strenuously did he twist and turn that his thin sacking blanket slipped off and he lay there in only his skin. The witch laughed again and thrust the goodwife away.

"Something's got under your skin, good liar," she chuckled. "That's what's brought on the itch. You've worn that skin too long for ghostly comfort, and I spy bits of human foolishness that've wormed their way beneath. Now this knot here, that's love for good wine when you can get it. And this ridge here's punched up by memories of winter nights in the village tavern. This prickle's songs you'd sing, and this one's hopes for your children, and here's the affection you feel for your woman — Oh, what ghost wouldn't be pained to share skin-space with such an earthly crowd?"

"All these," panted the ghost, "all these I could easily bear. But what is this great burning that leaves me never by day or night, this fire where the heart should be?"

"Ah!" breathed the witch, and her hiss reeked like an old, cold dragon's breath. "There's torment for you, my friend, torment true. For you've let a dream get under your skin and it will take Death Himself to free you of that fire!"

"Then let me die!" sobbed the unhappy ghost; and because He is a courteous shade, Death answered his plea obligingly quick. The widow wept, the sisters moaned, the children whimpered and trembled, but when they went to close his eyes there was only air and icy wind. The witch of the greenwood hugged her ginger cat close to her hollow chest and grew fat watching them until, bloated with their grief and bewilderment, she burst like a water-bubble.

In a cave hung with the spectres of all dreams that ever burned in human hearts, one ghost sat alone over a glittering gameboard. It was a good game, a game called *crola*, and he played it against a patient ginger cat, and he played for a second skin.



# THE ULTIMATE DIAGNOSTIC

by Christopher Gilbert  
art: Artifact

*The author was raised on science fiction, he tells us, and started writing early, mostly to discover the details and implications of certain odd ideas. This is his second fiction sale; we also took his first, "Veils of the Body."*

Roy walked briskly into the medical building on Monday morning humming a tune from *Scheherazade*. The freshly-waxed corridor sparkled, slick and ready for the week's traffic; he felt the same. He'd spent the weekend with Evelyn again, and the afterglow soothed the apprehension he'd lived with for the past eight months.

He was in hiding, with the peculiar agony of not even knowing whether he was being stalked.

As he was putting on his white coat he saw the envelope, centered on his desk, and he stopped dead. *Tennessee Clipping Service*. His stomach lurched. Knowing quite well what it contained, he opened and read it anyway: "As you requested, here is the item regarding Dr. Roy Mulford and our final bill. Please let us know if we can help in the future . . ." He scanned the brief obituary: ". . . died April 16 after a long illness . . . survived by an aunt, Rose Florio, of Atlanta and a son, Nester, location unknown . . . funeral services at Chaucer's Mortuary . . ."

He had to sit down. Shivering, he read the clipping over and over. He remembered so well that wasted old body so plagued with problems: arthritis, Parkinson's, intestinal adhesions and obstructions, and then the stroke which had wiped out almost all speech. He could still see those delicate hands, the shaggy white head of hair, the eyes which he'd once fancied looked somewhat noble. Imagining the eyes forever closed, his breath shuddered, threatening to start him crying.

But he remembered also the other part: a healer gone bad, a physician whose real specialty was Medicare fraud. Lawsuits had accumulated, slow dreadful evidence of his callous errors in judgment. Some errors had killed.

Roy was still staring at the clipping when Dr. Mike Peters came in quietly on his thick crepe-soled shoes. An internist, he was still in his 30s, about ten years younger than Roy, red-headed and blandly hearty. He said immediately, "Hey, you're pale! What is it, bad news?"

Caught off guard, Roy turned the obituary over and said more than he intended: "Uh — an old friend in a nursing home died. Complications of a stroke. 72 years old. He's better off, really." As he spoke he casually covered the envelope with his arm to hide the return address.

"Sorry to hear it, Roy. You want to take some time off today?"

"I'd rather work, thanks. It's all right." They were both awkwardly silent, friends up to a point, and Roy had set that point.

After a pause, Mike said, "I couldn't help noticing the letter when it came Saturday. You've never gotten mail here before. The postmark — are you from Nashville by any chance?"

"No. I'm not. Passed through once." Roy tensed; his barriers rose. Mike had agreed not to ask such questions.

"Oops, sorry to pry. Sorry about your friend. To business, then?"

"Sure. Help distract me."

"Well, you were right about Mrs. Donahue. A case of dengue! First I've ever seen. Found out the lady had visited Mexico around Christmas. And the Lawford fellow: we tested his urine and sure enough, carcinoid syndrome. I sure wish you'd tell me how you do it."

"Maybe soon I will," Roy said. "Incidentally, that Korean lady doesn't have a thing except some unusual rheumatism. You can save her the tests if you want."

Then the phone buzzed, and both had work to do. Jenny the office nurse had come in. Roy had six cases to diagnose today; he had very little other function here. Every minute or so, as he prepared for this first appointment, the phrase kept playing in his mind: *He's dead! He's dead!* Twinges of both sadness and relief shot through him.

He tried to study the chart of the patient coming up: Arthur Allen, 60 years old, with multiple complaints centering around his abdomen and some unusual endocrine results. He'd finally been referred to Dr. Peters, whose local reputation as a diagnostician was growing each month.

Jenny brought Mr. Allen in and flashed Roy a brief secret smile as she closed the door. Jenny had a little crush on Roy, who was handsome in a military sort of way. She knew he was serious about Evelyn, a drug-company rep, but like everyone else she knew very little otherwise about Roy. He helped the frail old man onto the table, noticing the stiffness, the tremors, and the pink mottled neck.

"You'll be pretty dopey for a little while, sir," he said. "We need absolute stillness for this X-ray. It'll be a nice rest."

"My doc said this Peters can find out what's wrong with me if anyone can," Mr. Allen said.

"Let's hope so." For the three hundred and twelfth time Roy began his protective procedure, guarding against a danger which could come from anyone. In a casual gesture unnoticeable to Mr. Allen, he pressed briefly on a button concealed under the man's table. Then he spoke on the intercom: "Standing by, Mike? I'm starting." He positioned the X-ray unit over Mr. Allen's abdomen and began to administer the nitrous oxide through the face mask. "Just breathe deeply, sir, like it's good sea air —"

When the man was unconscious Roy swung the X-ray unit aside and



lay down on the second exam table across the room. Supine and serene, he began matching his respiration to Mr. Allen's, then rested his attention inside his forehead and relaxed his body profoundly. He waited for a peculiar special event in his neck, a gentle "pop" like a toothpick snapping. Now detached and nearly formless, he drifted free of his flesh, hovered above Mr. Allen, and descended, slipping inward like a hand in a glove. He adjusted himself within the confines, merged with the man's heartbeat and began to sense this new body.

Thoughts ticked off: *Pain in upper right quadrant. Throbbing at the fringes. Lower circulation sluggish; abdominal aorta constricted? Lymph glands swollen.* He sensed and noted subtle deviations from normal and his hypothesis grew into a chilly certainty. He exited. Five minutes later he stood in Mike's office.

"I think it's the beginning of liver cancer, spread from the pancreas," Roy said. "I'm 98% certain. Poor old guy."

Mike frowned and scanned the chart notes. "But he was tested —" Then he shrugged. "Okay, buddy, I know better than to doubt you. I'll redo it and phone his doctor." Still writing in the chart, he said, "By the way, we got another out-of-state referral. The fifth this month. I don't know where they're coming from."

"Your fame's spreading, that's what's happening," Roy said wryly.

Mike scratched his neck and grinned, apparently embarrassed. "I know. I wish it were really mine! Seriously, Roy, I'm getting concerned about attracting attention. A couple of interns want to come over and study my methods."

"Don't worry. Just claim clinical intuition. You always test to confirm my hunches anyway."

Mike laughed once. "*Hunches*, you say? I wish you could get the credit you deserve. A doctor with your skills, masquerading as an X-ray tech . . ."

"It's all right. Silent partner suits me now. Credit doesn't buy groceries."

Mike sighed and dropped the chart. "Roy, I just don't understand. What do you *do* in that little room? You barely look at their histories, you don't do tests of your own —"

Roy shifted uneasily in his chair. "I'll tell you sometime. I'll have to work up to it. We did make an agreement, you know."

"Okay," Mike said. "God, I'm curious." Once again he encountered that barrier, not realizing that Roy felt the same disappointment that he did.

That afternoon Roy finally began to feel quietly jubilant. The death notice had released him from a snag in the past, and now his thoughts turned toward the future. On the back of a prescription pad he wrote:

Get driver's license somehow  
Check poss. of foreign credentials  
Va. Beach w/Evelyn — weekend  
Plants for apt.  
Champagne

He wrote some more, constructive plans which he'd held back for months. Then he folded the note, put it away, and allowed himself a smile which slowly spread like sunlight across his face and then down through his body, beginning to melt the knot in his stomach. Perhaps, he thought, life could begin again. Perhaps now he was safe.

Internally, Mike Peters was a calm man with the deliberateness of a marksman. He thought hard about Roy for three days. Eight months ago, after private demonstrations of the man's diagnostic talents, he'd agreed to their trial association under unthinkable conditions which included no proof of Roy's medical legitimacy and no knowledge of his methods. "I need to hole up anonymously for a while," Roy had said. "And I need to earn a living. I've done nothing illegal. You have no need to worry."

Yet Mike felt obliged to worry now. His reputation was coming to rest on a man whose last name he didn't even know. There were so many unanswered questions: Roy's secret closed-room business, the fake X-ray procedure, the nitrous oxide. And that triple-sealed envelope in the bookshelf.

Roy had told him emphatically: "If that buzzer ever starts going during my procedure, *don't come in*. Tear this letter open as fast as you can and it'll tell you everything. Then if you care about me at all, please follow the instructions. It's absolutely vital."

Mike did care about him; he felt a rapport and immense respect, even for his privacy. But a man had to protect himself. What finally made Mike decide to start checking was Roy saying he'd only passed through Nashville. Two of his sport coats and one pair of shoes had labels from a Nashville men's store.

Mike had a very clear snapshot of Roy at a barbecue. He also had an acquaintance in Nashville, a medical society type who would know all the local physicians, past and present. He also had an envelope and a stamp. Feeling guilty, he mailed off the photograph with a discreet inquiry.

That afternoon Mike introduced Roy to a middle-aged woman seeking the cause of her chronic headache and persistent hearing problems. She'd already seen three neurologists without success. Mike left them both in Roy's "X-ray" room.

Over the years Mike had learned that there are advantages to quiet shoes. A few minutes later he did something he'd never done before: he strolled down the hall on a pretext, and paused outside the door. Through the frosted glass he could barely discern the shape of Mrs. O'Connell's

red blouse on the examining table. But Roy seemed to be on the other table. *Lying down*. Could that be? Carefully, Mike stepped closer to the glass. Nothing moved in the room for five minutes; there was no sound. Finally he gave up waiting, totally mystified.

Eventually Roy came into Mike's office, shaking his head. "It's her bones," he said. "Paget's disease."

Mike frowned. "Paget's? Pressing on her cranial nerves — sure! I hadn't thought of that."

"Reynolds didn't either. Check her alkaline phosphatase level; it should be high. Try her on calcitonin."

Mike waved his hand in a gesture of deferment. He said, "I don't know why I bother even testing after they see you. You're amazing."

"Hm! Thanks, pal," Roy answered. Watching him walk out, Mike noticed a buoyancy in the way he moved. Something's changed, he thought. The man actually seems happy for once.

Then the reply came from Nashville. Mike didn't like it at all, but the letter left no room for doubt. The man in Mike's photo was most definitely known down there under the name of Sam Woodrow, a notorious physician who had earned the scorn of his colleagues. He'd disappeared nearly a year ago, shortly after being divorced by his wife.

"Absolute disgrace to the profession," his normally moderate friend wrote. "Robbing patients blind was the least of it. He was hurting people and had no regrets or morals that we could see. If that's a recent picture you have, the Tennessee attorney general would appreciate some locating info."

The letter included a newspaper photo of Woodrow; Mike sat staring at his associate's face and felt terribly torn. Medical ethics specified that he challenge Roy immediately, Mike knew, and probably call the police. But he let an hour pass, then the whole day, while he thought it over.

This was a hard one. Mike could just not match the dedicated man he knew with the person portrayed in the letter.

He delayed two more days, until his wife began complaining about his restless sleep. He saw no other solution but to confront. Late in the week they sat together in his office, enjoying the morning sun, discussing cases, with Mike learning as usual. But finally he closed the charts, took a deep breath, and started in.

"Roy, I know I agreed not to ask questions about you, but I'd like to re-open the matter if you don't mind. My reputation's starting to depend on your expertise here, and I'm feeling uneasy that you're still hiding so much from me."

Silence. Roy stiffened and didn't look up. Mike continued, "I've trusted you for eight months, Roy. Can't you trust me now with some



information about yourself?"

"I appreciate your trust, Mike, really, it's just that I'm hesitant to tell you certain things about myself —" Roy looked randomly around the room as if searching for alternatives. He caught the tone of Mike's voice. "You want an answer right now? Has something come up?"

"Yes to both questions."

This was too fast. He wasn't ready. But then he shrugged. "All right. I've been getting ready to tell you anyway. I only ask you to keep your mind open." He leaned back in his chair and looked out the window.

"You know I spend 15 or 20 minutes in that little room with each patient and come out with the answer. No doctor could be that good. You probably think I'm psychic. The truth is I've built up a large body of experience over many years, like any doctor, with hundreds of people sick from every possible disorder you can imagine."

"Quite a range in Nashville, is there?" Mike asked, and Roy looked sharply at him. "You have Nashville labels in your jackets."

Roy produced a painful smile. "All right, I'm from Nashville. Sorry I fibbed —"

Mike shook his head. "Look, I hate playing interrogator! I'm on your side! Trust me a little."

"I'm trying," Roy said after a long pause. "As I said, please keep your mind open. I'm an ordinary doctor except that I have a certain means of gathering information. Take Andrews yesterday, for example. All his joint problems, dysphagia, respiratory symptoms. You suspected scleroderma, his GP thought maybe lupus. Wrong. I *felt* his symptoms as he felt them — the funny throat tension, the problem focusing his eyes, the loose sphincter. Dermatomyositis. No doubt about it."

Mike nodded slowly. "I believe you. But what do you mean you 'felt' his symptoms?"

Looking back to the line of oaks across the highway, Roy felt very cold. He sighed. "Look, Mike, I've never told anyone about this except a psychic advisor in Nashville once, long ago, when I was scared. I found out years ago that *I can leave my body*, at will, with only a little preparation. What's more, when a person nearby is asleep, or anesthetized, drunk, whatever, I can enter that person's body and feel what he feels."

Mike had stopped breathing. He stared; his mind was racing, trying to process. He said tightly, "Out of your body?"

"Right. I stay in just long enough to experience the person's sensations. Their nervous system, their body senses become my own. I feel their diseases . . ." He was gripping Mike's forearm now. "Mike, nobody has ever experienced more than one case of scleroderma. I've felt ten or twelve! I know the invariants in a way nobody else can. Each condition has patterns, clusters of symptoms. Once you feel a disease you never forget it."

Mike just stared, wooden-faced. "Well. I've got to absorb this a little. Give me some time."

"Do you believe me? There's no way I can prove it to you." At that moment Jenny buzzed on the intercom: "Mike, your eleven o'clock's been here for a while."

Mike was still thinking about what he'd seen through the frosted glass panel. He shook himself and said, "Lord, what an advantage. Look, I want very much to hear more about this, but I'm tied up at the hospital most of today. I've got to know one more thing: what's your name?"

Roy's face sagged; he felt betrayed. "I figured you'd been doing some checking. You already have an idea who I am, don't you?"

"I think you're Sam Woodrow."

Roy put his head in his hands. "Please just go slow with that, Mike. Give me a chance. It's complicated. I can explain."

Mike stared at Roy, said "I hope so," and then abruptly left.

Roy managed to avoid Mike the rest of the day; he cancelled his last appointment and left early. He felt numb and guilty. He wanted so much to flee, start over again someplace else. This new matter wasn't supposed to come out except as a last-ditch emergency move. He kept going through possible ways of explaining to Mike; regardless of whether Mike believed him, the outcome would be negative either way.

He avoided his apartment that night, and sat in a small suburban cinema, chewing mindlessly on popcorn, feeling his happy future disintegrate.

The next morning, more by habit than by decision, he found himself headed for business as usual. He got in earlier than Jenny, and tried to concentrate on the first patient's chart. The referral letter from a doctor in Kentucky described a hodgepodge of vague somatic complaints. Some of the blood tests looked odd — nothing definite, just aberrant. Typical problem case.

Then, Roy looked more closely at Dr. Blackman's stationery under the light. There, an inch below the letterhead: was that a trace of a line? He knew a letterhead could be taped onto blank paper and copied, perhaps leaving a shadow of a line. Stationery could be faked. He examined the paper from all angles and still wasn't sure.

Jenny had made a routine call two days earlier for some more information, but the doctor was on vacation this week. How convenient, Roy thought.

*Coincidence or ruse? Coincidence or ruse?* His mind stalled. He hated this condition. He'd been so suspicious for so long that he would have diagnosed it as paranoia in anyone but himself.

Disgusted with his fear, he threw the letter down. He heard Mike's voice in the outer office. The system was still in place; he'd take a chance.

He buzzed Jenny: "Good morning. I'm ready for Mr. Gregory."

Joshua Gregory was a thin old man, heavily wrinkled and weak-chinned, looking very ill. He gave a cold intense stare as he entered the room.

"Good morning, Mr. Gregory," Roy said, uneasy. "I'm Roy Walton, X-ray technician. The nurse explained to you that this test requires some sedation? We need you to be absolutely motionless."

"Yeah, she told me. What're you giving me?" the man asked, in a curious voice: weak, yet somehow suffused with a meaning Roy couldn't discern.

"It's a gas like the dentists use. If you'll just stretch out there and take your shirt off . . ." Mr. Gregory first set down near the sink a small zippered packet.

"My inhaler," he explained. "Asthma. Gets so bad, doctor."

"I'm not a doctor," Roy said. Conscious of the man's eyes on him, he set about arranging the X-ray unit over his chest, adjusted the tank flow valve and finally placed the mask over Mr. Gregory's face. "Now take a good deep breath and relax," he said. "Just give in to it. You'll get sleepy soon." The man's watery eyes continued staring at Roy before abruptly closing. Something funny about his breathing, Roy noted.

When the man seemed sedated, he moved the X-ray machine away and stretched out on the other table. Relaxation didn't come easily to him this morning. When he finally felt the release in his neck, he drifted out with relief. For a moment he felt an exhilarating freedom and was tempted to keep going; he'd never really explored what he could do.

But fear and duty directed him into the old man's form and he blended with his heartbeat. It took only a moment to realize that the symptoms he'd expected didn't seem to be there: no itching, no intestinal cramps, no back pain. Something else was wrong: the body did not feel sedated. Not at all. Had he faked inhaling?

Suddenly alarmed, Roy began to pull out when he felt a frantic shudder all over like a sheet of something being withdrawn from beneath his skin. The next moment he felt himself in full control of the muscles and the breathing: alone in the body.

His mind raced. *Dead? Did the man die?* But the heart still beat strongly. *No. Bodies die, not minds.* A second later, he knew. This was it.

Eyes suddenly open, these aged, foreign eyes, he watched what had been himself stirring on the other table, then getting into a sitting position, then looking over at him: the same gray short hair, blue eyes, and square shoulders, but now wearing a cruel, leering grin.

Roy's mental alarms screamed. From long rehearsal of this nightmare possibility, he groped for the button on the underside of the table. Coordination in this still foreign frame was difficult. As he watched the man getting to his feet, *his* feet, he pressed the button again and again.

Twenty seconds later Mike Peters burst in, startled: "What's wrong? I heard that buzzer. Everything all right?" He was looking at the wrong man.

From his table, Roy shouted, "That's him! *That's* Woodrow! Get out! Go read the letter!" Roy waved him frantically out of the room. Dr. Peters stood astonished, looking at each of them in turn. The other man had the packet and was fumbling with the zipper on it.

"Go! Out!" Roy yelled. Mike stared for another moment, then closed the door quickly.

Too late, the man pulled out a small grey pistol from the packet. He turned to Roy, red-faced with fury. "You wretch! You foul bastard! What was all that?" His voice rasped in a Southern accent, uncomfortably familiar to Roy. The man's face twisted as he gestured with the pistol. "Get up, crud. I've got you now."

Shakily, Roy stood in the decrepit body and cleared his throat to test the voice. The tongue felt too narrow. The knobby teeth felt misaligned. He swallowed and said, "I got the death notice, Sam. Obviously you got out before. I was afraid of that."

"Damn right I got out. I felt your lousy heart failing. I had months trapped in that damn nursing home to figure out what you did and how you did it. But why? Why me?"

"I was desperate," Roy answered, "speech gone, afraid of a second stroke, and you were right there, passed out drunk on the next bed. I thought you were a menace, a disgrace to the profession."

"So you stole my body? Damn sanctimonious hypocrite."

"Maybe. But who is this? Who did you switch with?"

"A waste of an old orderly named Joshua. He got drunk and fell asleep nearby. Very handy."

Roy was assessing Sam's mood, trying to stall. He hoped that at this moment Mike would be removing the sealed envelope from the hollow book labelled *Annals of Pediatric Neurology, 1961*, something nobody would open by accident. He continued: "So Joshua died in my place? I'm sorry. Honestly, if ever someone deserved eviction it was you, Sam. You went bad. Secretaries hated to type your phony insurance forms. We all knew. I saw you picking through wallets and purses. But worse than that, you were making bad mistakes! The McColloch case, that little girl you messed up . . . someone had to stop you."

Sam sneered. "You stand in judgment all you want. I've got my own body back now, and it feels just great. You've got the ID and fingerprints of a useless orderly."

Roy watched the wavering pistol. The man was unfamiliar with guns. Mike would be unfolding the onionskin paper and reading now, the whole story.

*Keep stalling.*

"How did you find me? I was so careful."

"Your old biddy aunt came to see you, blubbering some crap about being your only living relative, so touched that you sent her a birthday card, but rather *confused* because it was mailed from Maryland . . ."

"And you weaseled the address out of her. My mistake."

"I tracked you down, all right, scum. I watched you from the parking lot, checked around, figured things out. Bided my time."

"Even faked the referral stationery? I know. You used your wits all right. If only you had morals to match. I want that body back, Sam."

The man laughed with immense scorn. Roy waited until he stopped, then said quietly, "Several nurses finally testified against you to start things rolling. Lots of police are looking for you, Sam. How many lawsuits would you guess are pending against you in Tennessee?"

Sam paused, then turned sour. "Who knows. I'm wasting time. How much money you got on you?" He reached into his pocket for the wallet, the one Evelyn had given to Roy. He began counting the cash. "Good. Car keys too. The red Fiat out there, right? Fair enough. I'm leaving. So long, Joshua. Rot in hell."

As Sam started toward the door, Roy said, "You want to hear about your family?"

Sam stopped, stiffened. "What do you know about my —"

And then Mike burst in again, and looked this time at where Roy was. Roy talked fast: "I'm here, Mike. That's Sam Woodrow, just like I wrote about. He's got a gun."

Dr. Peters held his position at the door; Sam couldn't point the gun at both of them at once, and he began losing control of the situation. He had never expected a plan to thwart him.

"I understand now," Mike said. "Dr. Woodrow, my secretary is safely locked in a certain room with instructions to call the police in five minutes unless you follow Roy's direction. I know your record. You'll be extradited, I'm sure."

Sam exploded. "You fool! This man stole my body! Isn't that a crime? He's supposed to be dead!" But as he spoke he backed up, and Roy stepped toward him.

"Listen to me. They've caught up with you, Sam. You're wanted in Tennessee and Kentucky for about eight different charges, including two counts of probable manslaughter. Face it! Walk out that door right now and you'll be in jail within the hour. Your *only* alternative is to trade back with me, then get lost. I want that body back."

"Like hell I will. Why should I?" But he was faltering.

"Number one, your own freedom. Number two, there's this: your daughter's in a very expensive college. Your son had serum hepatitis and ran up terrific hospital bills. The family has no life insurance from you, no income, and they're hurting. Do you know your wife's working in a pet

store?"

He knew he'd hit a soft spot now. "I'm sending your family 1500 dollars a month, anonymously, though they probably think it's from you. I felt I owed it to them. I'll continue doing that only if we switch back. How could you provide for them from prison?"

Mike said, "Five minutes are almost up, Sam."

Roy continued, pressing his advantage: "If we switch and then you turn me in to take your rap, the money will also stop. Do you understand now that I've got you?"

Sam said nothing, but his eyes were fearful. Roy said almost gently, "Just think of your kids, Sam. You're a lousy doctor and maybe not much of a human being. At least you might make it as a family man."

"Why should I trust you?"

Roy sighed. He felt an ominous chest pain as he did so; he didn't like the feel of this body. "I want to continue what I'm doing here. This is the peak of my career. Also, there's a woman who knows me in that body, and I don't want to lose her. But if you want, I'll send you the money order receipts."

As Sam stared at Roy, his neglected gun drooped toward the floor. Mike moved swiftly; he brought his fist down in a vicious chop to Sam's wrist. The gun clattered onto the tile floor.

"Now," Mike said, "want the police? Once they're called, that's it."

Sam winced as he rubbed his wrist. His shoulders slumped. "All right, let's switch," he said. "My family hates me anyway, always did. But you'd better keep that money coming or I'll find out. I'll know where you are!" He sounded childish and feeble now, facing the two men. "I'll just switch with somebody else. No big deal. Start over." Abruptly he got up on the table. Mike reached for the intercom.

"Thanks for the help, Mike," Roy said later, back to normal. "You really came through. Now that you know about me, I hope we can be friends. All I want is to continue working here, but it's up to you."

"It's all right for now," Mike said. "I've got to think this through. But let me make sure I understand now. That death notice from Tennessee, that was you?"

"Yes."

"And you had already . . . *commandeered* Sam's body?"

"I know it's hard to justify, but yes."

"So to get out, Sam had to learn to do what you do?"

"I think once you go through it, something is broken. It gets easier."

"So he's likely to switch with someone else out there."

Roy nodded. "He'll find somebody. I shudder at the thought, but I don't know what we can do about it. He's 'at large' now, as they say."

Mike had thought farther ahead than that. "And what are you going to

do when you start getting old and sick? It seems to me," he said softly, "that there are two of you at large."

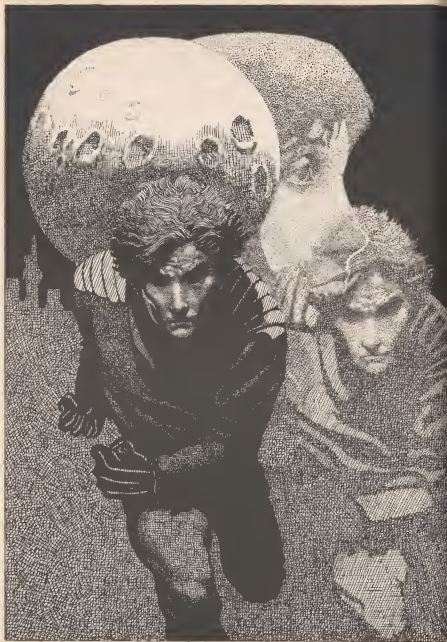
Roy had no answer, but simply met Mike's gaze as best he could, and felt the distance begin to grow between them. ❧



## SKYDIVER

Hurled from the hatch of a rational life,  
He hurtles through the blue above us,  
Borne up by the model democracy of molecules  
Bumping into each other at random, and though  
That may sound snide or flip, it's just my way  
Of talking; I honestly feel amazement, only that,  
At Man, the mighty copycat, who just by looking  
At a dandelion has come up — and now floats  
Down — with this, the supreme expression  
Of faith in things unseen: the wind,  
The mind, the patient skill of seamstresses  
Running immense lengths of nylon  
Through their clamoring machines.

— Tom Disch  
**Skydiver** 95





# FINALITIES BESIDES THE GRAVE

by John Barnes

art: Janet Aulisio



*Unpleasant futures and present trends that turn out to be pretty awful are as much of science fiction as are those settings that would be fun to live in. The story's setting, be warned, is not a nice one at all.*

*The author grew up in Bowling Green, Ohio — which he didn't like — and went to school in St. Louis, Missouri, which he did. He has one other story published, in CoEvolution Quarterly, in the Fall, 1982 issue. Further, he tells us that our comments on ten other stories he has submitted over the past three years have been invaluable; and he even accuses us of persuading him to want to write science fiction. While feeling persuaded, the author has been working as an analyst/programmer in New Orleans.*

*In his letter to us, he further comments: "About the story itself — the title, as you may have noticed, is the last line of Robert Frost's 'The Hill Wife'."*

When I saw the kids in gis headed toward me I did what anyone with any sense does, and crossed the street. That's the uniform of wallet-lifters and head-crackers, at least in Tucson. Trying to keep an eye on them and get around one of the bigger rubble heaps at the same time, I wasn't much watching where I was going, and I ran broadside into a dark-haired woman as she stepped up onto the curb. She almost fell, and as I steadied her I saw that she was slim and rather good-looking — even the norman didn't quite obscure that.

"Sorry," I explained. "I was trying to get away from those hitos across the street. You Americans make me nervous that way."

"It's all right." When her hand trailed off my arm, it was slow, and very soft and cool — I almost missed what she said next. "Are you British?"

"Australian."

She looked at me curiously. "I've never met a foreigner before. I'd heard accents like yours in old movies. What are you doing here?" She flushed. "I mean —"

"Quite all right. I'm over here to look at some supporting software systems for the Australian Air Force." I turned on all the charm I could come up with, not worrying too much about the accent — anything vaguely Ronald-Colman sounding would obviously work on this one, and though I'd been worried about some small slips in the cover persona in the last week, I'd been more worried about the creeping loneliness, what they call Monitor's Crazy, that desperate need to talk with somebody, be with somebody, with your guard down. I was starting to get fuzzy, I knew, careless about details, and I only had seventy-four days to go.

The conversation, with enough effort, adjourned from a hot dusty street to a relatively cool movie theater — a couple of the ceiling fans were working. Despite her being in the norman, she was pretty receptive to a little stroking and cuddling, and when I fired the autosyringe against her leg I don't think she even noticed. For the first time in a long time, things were working right.

One little detail almost did spoil it. The film was one of the Ben-Lithe-of-the-Moral-Guard series, and somewhere in the middle of it one of the pervert ring he was tracking down said, "Can you imagine the things they do in Tokyo?" For one second, I really thought I'd cry.

But I didn't, and by the time I got her up to the hotel room her face was flushed, and she was looking at me fixedly.

Usually after a couple of hours when the drug wears off they start screaming "What have I done" no matter how obvious it is, but this one just lay there for a while. I knew I ought to get her out the door before the effects wore off completely, but it was so damned nice to have company that I went ahead and took the chance of letting her stay. I thought idly that this must be another effect of the Crazy, breaking rules like this — which was odd, because events like this were supposed to ward it off. Seventy-four days, I thought, and here I am doing something risky.

She let out a little, sighing whimper, and I tensed for the scream. The incriminating hardware was all in the kit bag — I wasn't *that* careless, anyway. She sighed, slow and soft, a noise like snow falling would make if it made any. Her gray eyes looked happy, or contented anyway. "Let's do it again," she said, "a little slower this time."

I hugged her close, kissing her neck just where the damp, stray curls of hair touched it, trying to figure out what was going on but enjoying it too much to worry. This time it was a lot like I remembered it should be, like I imagined it would be again after Extensive Debriefing, and afterwards we both lay there, cuddling and stroking, agreeing it was great. I felt so unguarded I decided to give her the name I was staying under, breaking a few more regulations. "I'm John Hare, by the way. Introductions got rather lost in the middle there."

"Mary Lynn Burlman. Pleased to meet you." She giggled. "I do hope we meet socially sometime soon."

"I *am* sorry about the rate things happened at."

"That's okay. I didn't mind. You were so nice I felt like I knew you anyway. Most guys will take you somewhere and do it, but afterwards they start yelling 'slut,' and then the Noses come crashing up the stairs and it's out the window or take fifteen backzippers and lose my teaching certificate."

"You're a *teacher*?"

"Of course. For lesser mortals it's only five lashes."

"Well," I said, "you'll pardon my asking, but I thought that that job

required all sorts of proof of morality —”

“The Moral Guard was quite properly impressed by my conversion at the age of seventeen. Actually I was just hanging up my gi to meet a better class of guy, but I really decided to go the whole way, and I made a good enough impression to get into the State Teachers’ College. It was that or nursing school or home ec, and I hate sick people and babies.” She wrinkled her nose; I thought I hadn’t seen anything so pretty in ages. “They smell.”

“What’s home ec?”

“Home economics. What they call WT, wife training, now. Anyway, I’d been lucky — no immorality or deviance convictions, just two accessory-to-manslaughters and some assault charges. There’re a lot of places where even the porkers just think of that as good, wholesome adolescent fun.” She yawned and stretched; I put my head down to nuzzle her neck. It took me a minute to place the scent — it was baby powder, probably soaked in alcohol to extract the perfume, the poor girl’s cologne. She pushed my head back up. “You’re the first foreigner I’ve met, John. What are the women wearing in Tokyo these days?”

I shrugged. “Kind of a jerkin, I think, with a short skirt and a bustle. I’m afraid I’m a little out of date.” Four years, almost exactly, out of date, and getting a little tired.

“It must be wonderful not having to wear a norman.” She gestured vaguely at the crumpled pink heap on the floor. “They’re so ugly. Knee-length and high-necked and *ugly*. Besides, you can’t walk in the stupid black pumps, and there’s too much skirt to show off your ass.” She stretched again and I admired the view; her face, I realized, must look older than she really was. “I’d love to see what you’re talking about. Men are hopeless at descriptions. We haven’t even seen photos in the past few years. What’s Australia like?”

“Uh, the seasons are reversed?”

“Trust a schoolteacher to ask a question you can’t answer.” She rolled over and gave me a long, hard kiss, then snuggled up and went to sleep in the crook of my arm. For a long time I just lay there, taking slow deep breaths through her damp hair, running a hand up and down her arm. Once I got up and peeked through the musty gray curtains, but the street was its same old self, dusty and empty and dead, and for all the noise that Tucson made on a Saturday anymore we might as well be the only survivors. I looked at my watch — just past one, going on two; and at the mirror — twenty-nine going on forty and getting paunchy. There was plenty of time to spruce up for a four o’clock appointment, maybe even wash my hair — I like to feel fresh for those things. Maybe I’d even offer Mary Lynn some of the real shampoo that was the main privilege of this particular cover. (I had smelled the strong soap on her hair.) Then again, being in an air-conditioned room was probably a big treat for her.

I switched on the radio and let it play just loudly enough that words could still be made out. The station wasn't a GoodNews affiliate, but as no foreigner listens to those, no harm was done to my cover. It was one of the little FM stations that survives on ads from pizza places and funeral homes, playing old songs from the approved list, mostly sentimental love stuff and patriotic. After a few of the former I was feeling sad and lonely all over again, so I got back in bed and cuddled up next to Mary Lynn.

When I woke up it was pushing four and our bodies were stuck to the soggy sheets with our sweat. The air conditioning was working badly as always, and I no longer had the time to wash my hair; in fact, I needed to start getting dressed right away.

Gently I disentangled myself from her and reached for my shorts. "Going to send out for the Noses?" she asked, not seriously.

"I'm afraid we foreigners lack the moral strength for that, Mary Lynn." I was buttoning my shirt, really wanting a shower now. "Maybe I should go to a Christian surgeon and have the right thing done for those of us with strong passions. Maybe it would stop me from spraying in the house."

The comb fighting with my hair was losing. With a mental sigh, I gave up — Redman would probably be in greasy overalls anyway. "I have some business to take care of before Sabbath," I explained, "so I'm going out about that. Can you get yourself out of the hotel without trouble?"

"Shouldn't be a problem."

"Would you like to have dinner tonight?"

"Sure." I suggested a place; she suggested a more intimate one; I agreed. With a last survey of the grubby little room that was the best Tucson had to offer, I gave her a nod and said, "Seven o'clock, meet you there," and was out the door. It occurred to me that I was whistling, and that crazy loneliness was somewhere way, way back in my mind. I liked it that way.

Redman started out with "Call me Dave," which was a bad sign to start with. I hate it when they're friendly. Furthermore, he wasn't the usual basement-lab-troll type, the kind that spend several years on end working on the Gadget, whichever of the several it might turn out to be. He did have thick glasses, his jeans and t-shirt did need washing, and his short, sandy hair looked like it had been gradually shellacked into place with his sweat, but he just didn't have the hard fanatic glint in his eye that years of scrounging parts and money produce. Actually, during the before-business small talk, he came across as a bit of a Renaissance man, well-read as much as an American can be legally, an amateur painter, and a one-time athlete.

As we went out to the Q-hut behind his house, I found myself hoping that he didn't really have anything.

It didn't seem likely, though.

He was talking at a fast gallop the whole time, in that odd, high, light voice that didn't go with the Texas drawl. I asked where he was from; it turned out to be Beaumont, which explained the accent and all those paintings of Jesus hanging in his house. "Learned a lot there, more on my own since, didn't make engineering school but I think I'm about caught up. That garden there's organic, drip-irrigated, learned that from Dad — cheapest way to do things for the home and beats the daylights out of supermarket prices. Not much work, either — the old rugging there keeps the weeds down. I just walk out there and pick what the Good, Sweet Savior gives me for dinner, and he gives me pretty good since I make it easy for him. I guess that's usually about the way of things.

"Now, right in here is where it is, this Quonset hut, I guess you figured. The biggest problem I had was with getting a large, superhard vacuum tube for the electron-positron collision vortex. That superconducting set of focussing magnets was no piece-a-cake to get ahold of either — eventually I ended up stripping it off an old military space shuttle and spent two years rehabbing it."

There was absolutely no question, I thought glumly. He had a working MAM power plant built around a Yamanaka Positron Emitter. I asked him where he'd gotten that particular item.

"Smuggler from Mexico. Hate to have any money making its way to the yellow Jesus-haters, but they had these things and we didn't. Get a few of these running, though, and Old Satan will find he's in lots of good pure grade-one American-made trouble."

I found myself thinking of Dad, somewhere a few hundred miles west, lying with God knows how many others in a bulldozed trench, and all of a sudden the loneliness was back. For a minute I thought I'd lose everything, but then something snapped into place.

Redman was a nut-lop job, had probably had the Christian operation done when he was in his late teens. Beaumont was an early center of the Church of Sweet Purity back when it was merely an aberration and not the law of the land. He must have been among the first few.

Usually that gives them a hell of an emotional commitment to what it was done in the name of. There was very little chance he'd take the bait, and I'd be fully justified in just taking care of him now, but — I had started to like him, so I might as well dangle it, anyway. "Mr. Redman, as you might be aware, I'm not authorized to buy your device just immediately. What I am authorized to do is to offer you a considerable sum of money and a salary to come to Australia and work for my firm, developing this. You could have a fully-equipped lab, and all the parts you need. . . ."

He shook his head. "This was built by an American, for Americans. I like to think it may be Jesus' instrument to make us great again."

I knew I ought to just deal with him then and there, but an image kept

swimming up in my mind of him working there far into the night, setting each thing just so to get it perfectly right, fussing over every single part, soldering with more care than a surgeon takes because each chip was so precious . . . an odd little picture of him lying there on the cot beside the work bench, exhausted, sweat-drenched, and clammy. I just didn't want to do it, so I tried again. "Perhaps I didn't make myself clear, Dave. We already have these devices in the outside world. Once cheap, efficient positron generation is available, the rest of the system follows very quickly. I'm offering you a position because your engineering and innovative talents appear to be far in excess of what you'd be able to use in this country. You would find a matter-antimatter power system impossible to make and market here anyway — by mutual agreement between the central banks, finance wouldn't be available here, and in any case the UN wouldn't allow the YPE to be sold in America."

He grinned triumphantly, pointing to a set of graphics-machine print-outs on the wall. "Got it about nine-tenths doped out how they work, myself."

He was right. Anyone, of course, can X-ray one and draw the parts, but he'd actually figured out all the materials involved. "Laser and vortex for inefficient fusion," he said, going on like the kid who got the alarm clock back together. "Neutrons from the fusion drift to the film here; and the big positive charge on the film, plus the magnet, pushes emitted positrons out on the hard-vacuum side. Took me a while to figure out what combination of materials would be strong enough, gas-tight enough, and still be a good positron emitter after neutron addition; but I did it."

"Brilliant," I said, meaning it. I looked around the room once, nodding. The careful tidiness, the deliberate care taken in working drawings for his eyes only . . . and the stubbornness. I wanted to have about ten old friends to get good and drunk with. If I could just not hear this harsh, jolting English — more than anything I wanted to be through the Extensive Debriefing and *home*.

I took a slow breath. No question. Monitor's Crazy was getting me. Still, if I could hold off on getting maudlin, I had a dinner date tonight; and besides, this was a relatively simple problem. I suspected that everything was in this beat-up old Q-hut, but I'd do the house too to be sure.

I pulled out my pocket recorder. "I'm sorry you feel that way, Dave," I said, and pushed the hidden button. The little tracer dot from the low-powered laser was right in the middle of his forehead. He almost had time to gasp, staring at the red beam shining in the light dust in the air, before I punched the second button and gave him a burst of microwaves. The clot formed instantly, big as a golf ball, right between the frontal lobes. He was dead before he even started to sway, and he crumpled rather than fell. Usually you don't get a clean shot like that.

Of course it doesn't take much effort to get a fire going in a workshop or

lab. For that I could use almost anything on hand. The hard part was disabling the homemade automatic extinguisher — the software in it was damned clever, including a couple of sabotage detectors to make parts of it lie low for a few minutes just in case someone tried to do what I did. Fortunately the pocket reader spotted the odd blocks of code, and after I recorded them for later study I just wiped the whole works. An astute arson-man might have figured that out; but Gomez wouldn't, if my dossier on him was accurate.

I opened everything flammable and kicked it over, then hotwired round the transformer on the MAM and fed in direct 120V AC, more to make sure that no one else picked up the YPE than anything else. After the two big vacuum-tubes ruptured and the resistors were smoldering, I pitched it against a drooling can of solvent. It went up with a roar and I got out quick.

The house was a bit trickier — he turned out to have a safe that was supposed to be good to 500° C. Fortunately he hadn't invested in one that was blast-proof, and I got the door blown — I guess he was only afraid of fire.

There were copies of all the working drawings in there, in a couple of cardboard boxes that almost filled it. I took those upstairs, and put them on the bed, then got the curtains lit. Flames were beginning to lick out one window of the Q-hut, I saw, so I got going.

I was most of the way downstairs when I heard a little yowl. The old slogan is, "If they were innocent, they wouldn't be bystanders," and by and large we do work that way, so what I did next was professionally inexcusable.

I trotted back up the stairs. The bedroom was going to go up in a hurry, the bed and some stuff on top of the dresser already caught, some little places on the carpet near the window about to go.

Right in the middle of it was a mother cat — she must have been Redman's — trying to get her kitten out.

I jumped in. I knew I was losing time and that firemen and porkers could be here any minute, but I couldn't leave them like that. She seemed to know I didn't mean any harm when I scooped them up. Probably she had just always been able to trust people, I thought as I ran down the stairs with them — strange idea.

I just wanted to let them out the door, but she started to struggle as soon as we got downstairs. I got her out the door anyway, despite some scratches from what felt like eight little razors on her back feet, and started to close it.

She left the kitten and raced back in. Where there's one kitten, there's several, I realized.

I went back up after her — I know that's crazy. Redman was out in the Q-hut, dead; and I hadn't been that worked up about that routine part of



the job, but here I was saving his cats.

By the time I got back to the bedroom she was standing at the door and wailing. The heat was more of a solid, painful presence than anything else. I squinted, eyes watering, took a deep breath in the hall, and went in. I hope I had guessed right that they'd be under the bed.

The flames from the bed were a foot high in places, and the covers were on fire right down to the floor. I had never been anywhere so hot before. I knelt on the floor, noting abstractedly that it was hot enough to scorch my knees, not a real burn, just like a sunburn. This had better be my last trip.

Mother cat was still at the door, meowing; the little ones were at the end of the bed, right where I was looking, unable to come out on the hot floor and being slow-cooked by the burning bed over them. I scooped them up in my arms, counting five, and got up. My scalp was itching and my knees and the soles of my feet hurt — I had the eerie feeling that my hair was on fire, but my arms were too full of cats to check.

Eyes almost shut, I made it out the door and down the stairs, mother cat following and mewing the whole way. I kicked the door open and set all the kittens down on the stoop.

The mother was looking up at me, and I reached down and stroked her. She should have plenty of time to get them moved somewhere, I thought; but, just in case, I moved the whole crew down to the driveway culvert. She seemed to appreciate it — I got purred at for my trouble — but I had really overstayed my welcome and a half dozen neighbors could well have seen me. I was six blocks away before the sirens started, but that's cutting it a lot closer than I like to.

I kept thinking about that mother cat. Maybe it was some effect of the Crazy, but her expression — well, I know it sounds dumb, but she looked a lot like my mother had when the Blue Berets suddenly burst into Camp St. Paul, with a couple weeks to spare — for us.

On my way back to the hotel, I slipped into the bathroom at an ice cream stand and changed into the clothes from my kit bag. I carried the ones I'd been wearing for the Redman job a couple more blocks and threw them into the back seat of an abandoned car — not orthodox procedure, but effective enough for the few days I had to avoid detection. I went up the back way to my room. It took a lot of washing and an impromptu haircut before I felt ready for my date.

The place she'd picked for dinner was a nice open-air place. The sun had just set; and, power being expensive, the stars were unbelievably sharp and clear. For the occasion I wore a summer norman — light blue ice-cream suit with white shirt, red tie, and straw boater. She was in pretty much a copy of what she'd worn that afternoon.

The food wasn't much — synthosugar is a big Arizona product, controlling a high percentage of jobs and an even higher percentage of

state legislators, so it was all miserably sweet. On the other hand, the dancing shadows from the amber glass-jar candles made the little place seem almost as romantic as it was supposed to be, and I was definitely not lonely; the evening was a success before it began as far as I was concerned.

"How long will you be in Tucson, John?"

"Another week, maybe. Our Air Force wants me to look over a couple of new fighter-control programs; we're taking a bigger share of peace-keeping in the next UN Five Year Plan. You'll be starting school again in September?"

"Yeah."

The conversation lagged through most of the meal, allowing me to concentrate on the wilted salad and spotty potatoes more than I wanted to. There's always that fear in any public place that there's a bug around, or maybe your waiter is a Nose. Mary Lynn probably didn't know enough to be afraid in a hotel room; since I had swept mine regularly, I wasn't worried. The bugspotter hadn't found anything much above random numbers in weeks.

Dessert came, orange gelatin with whipped cream, and I was still working on the safe small talk. "Do you like children?"

"I don't know. A lot of them in my class are very polite, really well-trained." She let her voice drop. "Here's hoping when they hit puberty they go at it like bunnies."

"Sorry — I forgot you deal with them professionally."

"I'd love to have some of my own." She had slipped one shoe off; I felt a warm, clean touch as she ran her foot up into my pant leg. She was smiling.

"Well, not in the restaurant, certainly." I was about to whisper that she ought to be more careful, but she held a finger up. "This place has been bugswept," she said. "They do put a lot of plainclothes boys in here all the time but no one's close enough to hear us. And as for this," and her foot slid up and down my shin like an agitated gerbil, "unmarried schoolteachers have to worry about getting fingered as lesbians. This will go down on my record, if anyone's watching, as regrettable but harmless and healthy."

The band was starting up; most of the dances of the last seventy years were illegal, so I brushed up on my foxtrot and waltz that night. Afterwards, there wasn't much hope of smuggling her up into my hotel at night, and she lived with three other girls, so I just walked her home. We held hands and talked about her childhood. I didn't talk about mine.

"How did you know the place was bugswept?" I asked suddenly, keeping it casual as we got to one lonely corner.

"Same way I know you're a Monitor. I know what to look for."

Denying it wouldn't do much good. And I could hardly kill her on a public street, even a deserted one — too many potential eyes around.

"How did you arrive at that conclusion?" I asked.

"You carry an autosyringe with an aphrodisiac. That's not exactly a drugstore staple around here."

It's also not general knowledge, so what I had here was either a porker or a Nose, and one pretty well up in the hierarchy.

"By the way," she added, "don't let me alarm you." I braced, waiting for the hand on my shoulder. "I'm not with the government; I command Resistance activities in the Tucson area."

Well, at least that explained that. Assuming she wasn't just a Nose with a good story for getting information. I gave her a hug and a kiss. "Your place is a couple of blocks up, isn't it?"

Mary Lynn nodded, and the soft curls falling around her face bobbed gently. For a second I wanted to be anywhere, anywhen, anyone else, or at least just alone, really alone, with her on this deserted street in the desert. "Still going to take me home?" she asked.

"Yeah. I'll be back in touch in a day or two, though."

I was lying, of course; it's routine in a situation like that. There had been a drinking buddy in Magnitogorsk who was in some sort of Marxist revival group, and I'd had to lose that contact too. Aiding the Resistance is not our job. As long as the fanatic governments of the world are in no position to threaten the authority of the UN, we stay out. That's what "respect for sovereignty" is supposed to mean, anyway.

Besides, there was one way to be reasonably sure she wasn't a Nose. If I could walk away unrestrained and unfollowed from her door, she either wasn't one or was much more subtle than they usually get.

At the door I held her once again, enjoying the heavy, warm feel of her body through the crisp cleanness of the norman. Then I kissed her goodbye and left.

She passed the test.

I had to take a few precautions, anyway; that night I switched hotels and cover ID, including hair and eye color. The next day, early, I got through the phone modems to the files at Tucson airport and got my old ID onto a flight and created a new record of my arrival.

Still, it almost seemed a waste. One more ID change for one more day — all I had to do in Tucson was see Harriman. But caution counts, and I'd hate to get caught with just seventy-three days left to go.

Harriman's office was stereotypical for an American businessman today — completely afunctional, a little puddle of luxury behind a solid wood door. The carpet felt like grass, the walls were decorated with good, imported holos, and the desk looked to stretch a block in either direction. Most of it, of course, was basically a bar anyway. Behind him there were two big glass sliding doors, a brilliantly green landscaped balcony, and a brown expanse of mobile home courts, probably about thirty-five years

old.

Harriman himself was going bald, but not badly, and had a big shock of silver hair that was probably blond some years back. His suit was visibly London cut — probably from London at that, despite the American tags he'd no doubt had sewn in. There were a few too many rings on his fingers for my taste, and his tan was deep and rich; a lifetime of those tans had given him skin like old leather, well-oiled and tough. The bright blue eyes, my information said, got to be that color the same way mine did — one more high-cost illegal-but-tolerated import.

For once I was looking forward to one of these things. Not that they're ordinarily that bad — get the information, make arrangements, forward information, get out of town, easy. Just usually they're both boring and risky at the same time, which is a bad combination. Today, though, I wanted to spend my time doing exclusively things I'd done a hundred times before.

"Come in, come in," he said. "I have what you need here. Would you like a drink?" The only decent liquor in the United States hides under executive desks, so I said yes.

"Right here." He handed me the standard list, the one that told me who had phoned or written St. Peter's Motors with technological ideas in the last month. Even though the Treaty of Halifax's secret provisions kept the number of places in engineering school drastically low, there was enough free-floating technical information for any basement tinkerer to cook up all kinds of things. Especially nowadays, when cheap, sophisticated components were making a renaissance of bicycle-shop engineering everywhere in the world.

About half the list was cranks — pills to turn water into gasoline, perpetual-motion machines, and so on. Another third was trivial, bag-of-tricks stuff that hurt nobody. That last one in six, though, was serious trouble from our viewpoint; it was re-inventions and developments on high technology with military potential. The Quarantined powers had been disarmed of nuclear weapons and banned from space — but that wasn't enough. The world had almost blown to Hell. . . .

"What do you do with that anyway?" he asked as I photographed it.

"What do you think?" Damn it, they *know*. There must be someone who can put things like this together with things like Redman.

"I just wondered why this guy Wilson is still around. That's a real threat. The one with the electric grease — that could cut into our market for machine part sensors."

"He's barking up the wrong tree. Using a piezoelectric effect in a thin fluid film isn't economically possible across any reasonable range of constraints, according to the evaluation team. He's bright — so we'd rather he kept chasing wild geese."

"Why don't you just, hmm, deal with him anyway? He's close enough

to some of the stuff we import —”

“Kill him? Not for your markets. As long as it won’t help your government break Quarantine, we have no quarrel. We may be your sole source of products, and you may be our biggest distributor in the United States, but you’re still a drop in the bucket compared with the world market.”

He drummed his fingers on the desk, the rings giving a little castanet effect. “Maybe,” he said, “and mind you I’m not religious and I wish we could still call ourselves *General Motors* — maybe someone else ought to run the world. It doesn’t seem right that the two countries with the greatest potential —”

“When you did run it, what did you do with it?”

There was an awkward silence. “If the Resistance was better funded or better armed —” I began.

He shook his head. “We’ve talked about it. Too many of our executives have a sweet deal going; free enterprise is more fun with no competitors. We could never get the consensus — or the guts — to do it.” He stared out the window.

Maybe starting to like people was a symptom of Monitor’s Crazy. Hastily I got the conversation back to business. “Two firms were caught in Utah last week. You’d better tighten security.”

He nodded. “We already have. Those guys were caught by the porkers who got the bright idea of following all the trucks to see what got loaded and unloaded. We move all our imports around in-plant, with no separate warehouses. We should be okay.”

“What about worker blackmail?”

“Everyone in a sensitive job is part gook. If we get turned in, they’ll have to run for their lives.”

It went back to small talk, harmless small talk. The deal was going to be the same as long as conditions were the same; names for us, imported parts for them. Meanwhile, Harriman and I could have a good drink together. Strictly routine.

But I was getting close to tears by the end of it, though I don’t think he saw.

I knew I wasn’t being followed, and Mary Lynn’s place wasn’t staked out; that’s the total of mitigating circumstances I can offer.

She’d mentioned, sometime last night, that she was the only one with a bedroom to herself. I found her window and rapped on it. She rolled out of bed, drew a gun from the table, and had me covered in one smooth movement that I had to admire. I raised my hands.

“John Hare, with a little editing, Mary Lynn,” I said.

She pulled up the sash. “Come on in, stranger. Sorry about the hardware. My roommates will keep quiet — we can talk.”

I climbed in. We stood there hugging for a while; as far as I was concerned, a hundred years would have been short for it.

It was a little room; the bed and dresser took up two thirds of it, and the ceiling was a bare seven feet. To judge from the pressed-board moldings, it wasn't much more than sixty years old. The walls were hung with bland landscapes, plus a couple of religious posters that conspicuously faced the window.

Several glasses turned out to be hiding in her top dresser drawer; we got two of them out. She carefully unpinned the JESUS WILL MAKE IT ANEW poster to reveal a real honest-to-God prewar preRepro bottle of Wild Turkey, less than half gone. Good liquor twice in a day; not bad, not bad at all. We settled back to do some cuddling and sipping. "Celebration," Mary Lynn explained. "I figured you were gone for good."

"I would have been if I'd been following rules."

"Yeah. Rules." She took a sip and sighed. "I get so tired of handing out 'Restore the Bill of Rights' pamphlets to be left on the shelves in public restrooms. The least they could do is allow us some assassinations and church bombings." She pushed her tangled hair up onto her head, then let it fall, shaking it from her eyes. "I wish I could leave with you. How soon do you go?"

"Some months. I wish you could too." I decided to switch over to my revelation story, the one we tell when people find out we're Monitors. At least it was closer to the truth. I settled back, looking up at the ceiling and sliding an arm under her. "You asked about Tokyo. Well, to tell the truth, I was born in the States. When I was two, my mother ran off with a Japanese businessman." (Actually, we only ran to San Bernadino; Dad was an attorney, and a sansei.) "I grew up in a big, clean, healthy city, one that wasn't falling apart. I'd love to show it to you."

She turned her head. I could feel her warm breath on my neck and smell the strong soap on her hair — I remembered that I had meant to give her the shampoo, which wouldn't fit my next cover anyway. Her lips grazed the skin of my neck for a moment before she asked, "What would we do there?"

"Maybe a long walk down one of the malls, first, with a stop in a kisaten for tea and pastry."

"There's a film I have to show the kids. It shows Tokyo jammed with people, crowded and miserable. Everyone wears old clothes."

"Sure they do. That footage is older than either of us. Forty years ago, say in the mid-seventies, a lot of working people in Tokyo were sleeping several to a room. But now it's the garden city of Japan — Ohira's Legacy is what we call it — wide malls and parks, lots of trees and open air, and quiet — everything moves on maglev within city limits."

"What am I wearing? One of those jerkin-and-skirt things?"

"Definitely. You have great legs."

"You have an evil mind. What do we do that night?"

"Well —"

"Evil mind!" She giggled.

"Okay, we go to a play or the movies. After that we go to some little cafe where the band plays the Tsukuba Sound."

"What's that?"

"It started out in the artists' community that grew up in Tsukuba, the science city. It's jazz, descended from some things Brubeck did with impressionism, but with a more explicit blues base, and some heavy Japanese influence, of course."

"I don't know anything about jazz."

"Even better. We go to a cafe to hear a good group, and stay there till two in the morning while I tell you all about it. Then we go home and party with the band and a couple of poets I knew in school. For breakfast I fix huge plates of eggs and ham and we all sit around wolfing it down and talking music and literature and politics. Everybody except the band is late to work, but it's Friday and that's normally a half day anyway, when nobody gets much of anything accomplished. That night we do it all again."

I looked over at her; she was near tears. I suddenly felt terrible, having run on like that. After all, for me there was the Extensive Debriefing, the period of intensive psychotherapy that would hopefully get the worst of the experience behind me, and then the whole rest of my life in the outside world. What did she have to look forward to?

I almost missed what she said next. "Could I come if I married you?"

At the time it seemed a perfectly reasonable question. "I don't know. They might get sticky about it, but if I completed my mission they wouldn't fuss much. If the UN is so worried about what happens in the Quarantined countries, I'm sure they can find somebody else to look into it for them." I stretched. "Anyway, how could you get permission to marry a foreigner?"

"If you promised to convert and become a missionary —"

"My papers wouldn't pass for that. They didn't back-cover me for the years before I 'existed.'"

She nodded, seeming to accept it. "What's your real name?"

The Crazy had me, all right; I told her. "John Yamada. I took my adoptive stepfather's name."

She giggled. "Wanted, John Yamada, tall Japanese, currently blue-eyed. Alert Christians can spot the yellow Jesus-hater by his hissing accent."

My teeth clamped. A wave of nausea rolled over me. "There used to be a lot of Americans with names like Yamada, Mary Lynn. Where are they now? We don't even have an accurate count of the deaths. If the UN troops hadn't turned up when they did, I'd be among them because of my

mother's connection."

Dad, I thought of you then, and the crazy thing — maybe the Crazy thing — was that it was baseball I thought of — sitting on the couch with you watching the A's, out in the backyard where you taught me shortstop — your old position for UC-Irvine.

I was squeezing the mattress edge hard. I took a breath and relaxed. "I'm sorry, but that wasn't funny."

She got very quiet.

"Look," I said, "I lost my temper. I'm sorry. If we do find a way to get you to Japan, though, you'll hear worse, even with political refugee status."

"What about Australia?"

"It's a nice place, but it's not home." Not that Japan had been much of one, either, when I got there knowing only "arigato" and "sayonara". "I guess you could get there eventually."

"I suppose I'd have to. Would you really marry me to get me out of here?"

"If you can figure out a way." I finished my glass. "Maybe I should just slip out like a gentleman."

"Would your papers stand up to a paternity suit if you gave in and married me quick?"

"Paternity suit?"

"You know the rule is use-it-or-lose-it. There're fertility drugs in the drinking water. I have abortifacients, but I haven't taken any yet."

"Mary Lynn," I said slowly, "I've had a vasectomy." She didn't know what that was; it had been illegal too long. I told her, and added that we were required to have them. She started out looking disappointed, twisting her hand in her lap.

She shook her head slowly. "Every goddam male in the world is castrated."


I started to explain, but she slapped me. I spread my hands, not knowing what to say or do. She hissed, low and fast, "If the UN is so goddam worried about the preachers and the mess they're making of this country, why don't you send the Blue Berets to straighten it out? Some of us are dying, and some of us might as well be dead, and all you can send is a few castrated spies!"

I could have talked all about respect for sovereignty and so forth, but since she was screaming at me, I didn't think she was in the mood. Her roommates might wake up and not understand, and she hadn't told me if her neighbors were okay. I left in a hurry; she threw a glass after me.

I didn't even get to give her the shampoo.

The next day I was Robert Angus, businessman from Indianapolis, trying to establish some contacts in Missoula. His hair was brown and his eyes were green. I settled in at the hotel I'm in now.



I came to this country to find myself, but all I've found out is I'm not here. They're all pretty crazy, too. If you lived in this loneliness all your life, well, you can imagine. 



## T.G.I.F.

Marooned alone on these crimson sands  
Five years by Earth's — dead Earth's — silent orbit,  
He genuflects near a crater's rim  
Where he's not lately trod  
To stare, then weep, then look gratefully up to God:

For there impressed in the Martian surface,  
Outlined in dust and lifeless soil,  
Lies the contour of desire —  
Ascent from the deepest, vastest hole —  
In six webbed toes, one heel and sole.

— Kenneth Hill

# Screen Reviews

by Baird Searles

## Yesteryear's Movie

Isn't it about time that somebody just came out and said it? George Orwell's *1984* is bo-o-o-o-ring. It's a dated socio-political tract disguised as a novel, and not very well disguised at that. One had hoped that it would remain in the sort of academic limbo to which it had been consigned in the 1970s, read mostly by classes whose teachers were suffering under the dual misapprehension that it was good science fiction and great literature, and who didn't have the guts to assign any real SF because that was, of course, simply pulp fiction.

But no. The year Mr. Orwell had so cleverly picked as a titular target (golly, it was really daring back in 1949 to actually be thinking a cosmic 35 years ahead) came along, and publishers with an eye to the main chance hyped it up all over again. Another movie was made from it. (Wasn't one enough?) It seems, however, that it took about a day into 1985 for interest to wane and for the novel to slide back into the category of yesterday's best seller, but we might as well take a look at the movie, for want of anything better during a slow period.

One must concede that Orwell is an expert writer, and that his social extrapolation is far from dumb, albeit single-minded. But the weighty, dreary didacticism of it all does it in as drama; and, some current examples to the contrary, film is still supposed to be concerned with drama in the broadest sense. Orwell was out to preach

against something, and that's the point of the whole thing. (Little has been made of linkage between *1984* and the distastefully violent anti-Communist atmosphere of the early 1950s, but the timing makes it unavoidable — and that's all I'll say about the politics.)

There's yet another problem with it as a film in the 1980s, and that is that the original book and film (1955), like it or not, set a pattern for the mass media idea of "science fiction" or, more correctly in this case, speculative fiction of the future. How many films thereafter concerned themselves with the rebellious lovers in a conformist society of one kind or another? Even George Lucas had a go at it (*THX 1138*) which was beautifully realized, but hardly original.

So all in all, this new version of *1984* (directed by Michael Radford) is a misconception, its only claim to distinction being the mournfully chancy one that it was the last film of a major name, Richard Burton (who, the very public private life notwithstanding, was both a fine actor and a great star — the two are far from the same thing). He does his professional best, albeit more subdued than usual — less, one thinks, because of illness than from the good actor's instinct to go with the material. And the material here is certainly in one key throughout. However, Burton brings a kind of silken elegance to the rôle of the ambiguous higher-up that stands out from the rest of what's happening; here is an actor trying to inject some

dramatic values into a thoroughly undramatic production.

And, as a final point, movies are supposed at least to be visually interesting even if drama has fallen by the wayside. Here again *1984* has its own built-in traps. The world of 1984 is so unremittingly dreary that I doubt if even William Cameron Menzies could have made anything of it pictorially. This version certainly doesn't. The eye is wearied with two hours of grey-blue-brown sets and costumes; and even the scenes that should be a startling contrast, such as the lovers' first tryst in the countryside, are flat and uninspired. It's interesting that in this area the earlier film, in black and white, was pronouncedly more successful.

Let's hope that *1984* in all its versions is now a dead issue, and will be laid to rest along with other manifestations of the year, such as the Reagan/Mondale campaign and the Jackson Victory Tour. I can't help noting as an afterthought that there were a great many smug comments to the effect that the real 1984 bore no resemblance to the fictional 1984. Much is made in the book of the failure of services and the breakdown of technology. Now the night before I went to see *1984*, I called the theater to find out the time of the first showing the next day. They were totally unable to tell me, apparently being completely incapable of figuring out the interval of time between when the theater opened and when the movie began. The projector failed between the previews (seven of them with no clues as to why they were being shown) and the feature. And has anyone attempted to ride an American train lately?

#### Varleycorn

*If producers must base their film*

and TV productions on something (rather than developing original stories Lucaswise), it's a relief when they start looking for stories among the classier acts of SF rather than going for *1984* or equally obvious and "presold" material. Some of the people who gave us a most interesting production of Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Lathe of Heaven* a few years back on PBS have now again dug about among the contemporary authors and tackled a short story by John Varley.

Varley is certainly one of the most talented and popular of the younger authors in the field, and all credit to the producers of *Overdrawn At the Memory Bank* for a quality attempt. There were, alas, some problems. The short story is a lighthearted piece which, padded and added to in order to make an hour-and-a-half production, became something else. And the additions, made by a scriptwriter apparently more used to writing for TV than SF, are pure corn.

First and foremost — you guessed it — there's the maverick living in a conformist society who sets himself against the system. This one is certainly less grim than Orwell's; the society is run by corporations rather than national states, and everything is put and kept in its place by computers — or computer, one should say, one HX 368 (first in-joke). It sounds remarkably like HAL at times (second in-joke). Most people seem to spend their days at spiffy computer terminals processing data.

Our hero Fingal is a rebel — and an expert hacker. He is not processing data; he has found his way into a forbidden area that shows movies and is watching *Casablanca*. For this he is condemned to compulsory "doppling": his personality is transferred into a small cube and then transferred

temporarily into the body of a tired female baboon on a nature reserve. (Doppling is supposedly recreational, and people do it for their vacations — but if it's compulsory and one only has 38 credits to one's account, one gets a tired female baboon.)

But by mischance Fingal's real body gets misplaced, and his personality will be lost permanently if it isn't transferred *into* HX 368 until the corpus is found. Well, once Fingal is in the computer, all Hell breaks loose. The young female tech assigned to keep track of him keeps telling him to simply create his normal environment and stay in the routine until matters can be corrected. This, Fingal is not about to do; instead he recreates Rick's Café straight from *Casablanca*, and proceeds to use it as a base to subvert everything including the female tech. His nemesis is "the fat man" (an excellent Sydney Greenstreet imitation; there's also a good Peter Lorre), in reality the head of the corporation.

All the tired elements here are additions to the story, and Varley should not be blamed. Inside-the-computer graphics are already somewhat overdone, as are those elaborate shopping malls (I'd guess in Texas) that have been used to death as futuristic sets. And I, for one, am tired of *Casablanca* (I know — heresy!); never liked it that much to begin with, but it was at least a respectable genre film until it became a cult. It would have been a lot funnier if a less iconographic flick had been used. But weariest of all is the brave, nonconformist young couple fighting the wicked, regimented society. *1984*'s pernicious influence carries on.

Just to prove one is not entirely against meaningful, "satirical" exercises, it might be worthwhile in passing to mention a mini-series appearing

on a cable TV network, based on *The Old Men At the Zoo* by the British author Angus Wilson. It's meaningful and satirical as all Hell, but it's also entertaining.

The time is the near future; due to a repetition of the fuel shortage, all motor traffic has been banned in Britain except for the privileged few. What's worse, Britain and the Arab states are about to go to war, with the U.S. and Russia carefully keeping hands off in a non-intervention treaty. And the Arabs have the Bomb.

A business magnate, who is the power behind the throne of Britain (Robert Morley in one of his juicier performances) has bought most of Wales in the last land crash, and proposes to move the population of the London Zoo there to save them, creating a sort of super animal preserve, and, incidentally, making great propaganda in the service of evacuating London quietly. The story is mainly concerned with the power struggles among the various curators while the Secretary of the Zoological Institution is trying to maintain some sort of sanity in the middle of all this. And then the denizens of the Insect House start pre-adapting to nuclear radiation, and there's the stuffed yeti in the Administration building . . .

## VIDEOWARES

**THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK** (CBS-Fox) is about a little old gray-green man who lives in a swamp and is visited by ghosts and young men waving swords. There is also a princess involved; she wears raffia mats over her ears. She has four boyfriends; two are mechanical and one is freeze-dried. This is obviously an attempt to cash in on the artistic and financial success of its great predecessor, *The Queen of Outer Space*.

## THE DUNWICH HORROR

(Embassy) is the film of one of H. P. Lovecraft's greatest hits that sent Lovecraft aficionados into spasms of hilarity with its opening, in which Ed Begley thrusts a large volume at Sandra Dee and says, "Here, Nancy, take this copy of the *Necronomicon* back to the library"; and with its climax, in which Dean Stockwell, as Wilbur Whateley, spreadeagles Miss Dee on an altar and props the same *Necronomicon* in her crotch.

Despite the nonsense (and what one would give to get HPL's reaction to it!), it's not one of those supercheapo productions, and has a worthwhile moment or two at the end when Wilbur's half-brother is evoked and starts stalking the neighborhood. It's done as an interesting effect. However, this is on the whole one for a giggly night's rental with popcorn.

**LOGAN'S RUN** (MGM/UA) is about guess what? Uh-huh. Two young rebels in love subverting a restrictive conformist society. And it's filmed mostly where? Uh-huh. Those big glitzy, "futuristic" Texas (or wher-

ever) shopping malls.

But there are saving elements. This restrictive culture is a butterfly society — or should one say caterpillar society, since one is subject to "renewal" (i.e. being eliminated) at age 30. The eye is pleased by pretty sets and people and some effective effects. The couple are Michael York and Jenny Agutter (seen more recently in *American Werewolf*), both of whom actually have personalities, and Peter Ustinov does a star turn as the only old person anyone has ever seen.

## THINGS TO COME DEPT.

Jim Henson and Co. are working on another movie more on the line of *The Dark Crystal* than the usual Muppet madnasses. It will use several "real" people and, if it's anywhere near as good as TDC, is something to look forward to.

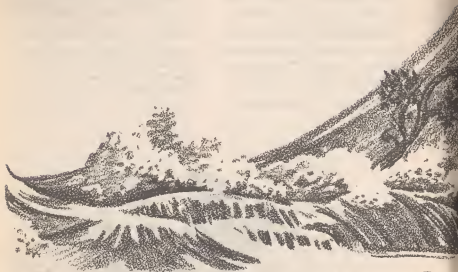
Is it true that there's a movie in the works called *Indiana Jones and the Jewel In The Crown* aimed at the two big markets of preadolescents and British TV buffs?

✂



**WRIT IN WATER,  
or, The Gingerbread Man**  
by Avram Davidson  
art: George Barr

*By degrees (not learned ones, though) the curriculum vitae of Dr. Eszterhazy is becoming known. A set of Enquiries of . . . was published a decade ago; this is the fourth new tale that the author has vouchsafed us — of a world with some odd survivals, mundane and otherwise.*





The spirit of the wood, the spirit of the water,  
and the spirit of the wheat-plant: they three be sib.

— old Slovatchko saying

The former Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Empire rode side by side with Madama D'Attila in her trim little chaise through Klejn Tinkeldorff, one of the less-fashionable suburbs of Bella. Bella was the capital of the Triune Monarchy of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania. Who was the former Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Empire and who was Madama D'Attila? Madama D'Attila had at various times been the favorite of two European kings, one Turkish sultan, and three Latin American dictators; alas, the Sultan and one of the kings had gone ga-ga, the other king had been ignominiously deposed, and all three of the dictators had met ends too dreadful to be told in detail. Madama D'Attila presently lived very quietly under the aegis of the Triune Monarchy, now and then receiving the calling cards of the oldest (and youngest) members of the nobility. Once a day, bravely wearing a modest assortment of her best paste jewels, she bravely drove her one-horse chaise through the streets of her little suburb. His Royal and Imperial Majesty did not choose that she should come any closer.

"One never knows, you know," said His Royal and Imperial Majesty.

The former Chief Eunuch, a martyr to the gout, had experienced increasing difficulty in the performance of his official duties; and, having taken a (platonic) fondness to Madama, had also (very quietly) taken his departure along with her own — and the privy purse of the *ci-devant* Sultan. "The mad do not need money," he had observed as he bade farewell to his friend the Assistant Chief Eunuch. "By Allah, that is a true word!" replied the new C.E., raking in his own share of the *ci-devant* privy purse. So now the former Chief Eunuch sat upon the front seat (there was no back seat) with Madama D'Attila, and showed to the local burghers his immense pale swollen face with its pink eye-lids and rouged cheeks and rouged mouth and painted eyebrows and painted moustaches. The burghers calmly tipped their hats. "There goes the kings' whore and the funny French gentleman," they said. And tipped their hats again. Respectfully. (The ex-C.E. by the way was wearing a fuzzy brown suit and a fuzzy brown hat and fancied himself in the height of Western fashion; perhaps he was.)

A gentleman riding by on his horse just then raised his riding-crop in a polite salute. "Who is *that*?" asked Madama.

"That is the famous Doctoor-Effendim," said the ex-C.E. "His name is Eszter Ghazi."

They stopped at Shueffer's shop and bought marzipan. Then they drove home and really do not appear in this account again. Perhaps this is too bad. One might grow fond of them. But, as King-Emperor Ignats Louis observed, "One never knows."

\* \* \*



Dr. Eszterhazy did not stop at Shueffer's shop and he did not buy marzipan.

Engelbert Eszterhazy, having already attained to three of the six learned degrees which he was eventually to have, was then engaged in preparing for the doctorate in music; he had spent a part of that morning in playing a series of Mozarabic masses (of his own arrangement) on the virginals (of his own design), to the great pleasure of the Papal Legate, one of the Examiners for that degree. Now he had come for a lesson with De Metz, in Composition. The great De Metz kept, in addition to his studio in Bella, a cottage in the suburb, regarding said cottage in the suburb as others might regard a chalet in the Alps or a villa on the Riviera. The lesson having been concluded, De Metz was observing as *obiter dictum* something on the nature of music and mathematic: "A single lifetime, sir, is not long enough to devote to the relation between music and mathematic . . . indeed, sir, one may begin by asking: *relation?* Music and mathematic? *Is there a division?* Song is number, sir, and number is song. What else is the Music of the Spheres but that song of all the morning stars singing together for joy?" Eszterhazy, assuming his instructor's question to be rhetorical, forebore to answer it by more than a low, tactful hum, a sort of small, murmuring voice.

And while this *mmmm* still sounded in the air, De Metz, still regarding his pupil with the same bird-bright gaze, in the same tone of voice asked, "Are you interested, Dr. Engelbert, in investment possibility?"

Engelbert could not have been much more surprised if the Emperor had asked him that.

"There is a man down the street who has invented an engine," De Metz said, "and I thought it might have investment possibility. They say that engines do have. I myself, you know, well, it is not my field. But you, Dr. Engelbert —"

"Yes?" asked Engelbert, prepared to hear himself described as a sort of one-man Baring Brothers.

"— you have so many fields. . . ."

The street was lined with trees and shrubbery and gardens. It was not yet what the Indians call the cow-dust hour, but Dr. Eszterhazy knew that when it was, quite a number of many-colored kine would troop back from the common pasturage and, suburb or no suburb, each cow would turn aside and tread the almost invisible path between the street and her owner's cow-house. *The ox knoweth his stall*, and . . . But behind one of the houses the cow-house had been converted into a workroom; and though the lineaments of the once-spring-house next to it had been preserved, the cool water flowing from the hill behind no longer served to cool the pans of milk and keep them fresh while the cream rose. "Remind me, Engelbert, to tell you a very amusing story about the Gypsy and the mouse," De Metz was saying; then De Metz said, "Ah, Engineer Brozz! Good later-afternoon. I have the honor

to present Dr. Eszterhazy." Engineer Brozz was very tall. And very thin. And Eszterhazy had the fleeting impression that he had seen him before.

His appearance might not have led Eszterhazy to have thought, immediately, in terms of one who had invented an engine with investment possibility. Such a type did not precisely flourish in the Triune Monarchy ("fourth-largest empire in Europe") . . . as distinct from, say, the New-England Province of America, where, one understood, every Yankee kept next to his fireplace a device intended to provide either perpetual motion or a supply of wooden nutmegs. . . . Still, some years back, there *had* been Gumm. Gumm lived in the Scythian Highlands and was an engraver of religious woodcuts with brief texts, Gumm had been caught in flagrant delight, stripping the lead from the parson's roof; and Gumm had said that he needed it because he needed a soft metal. For what? For a *notion* of his, that was his own word, the word *invention* seemed not to have been in his vocabulary; for a *notion* which would work a very great change in the production of religious engravings with brief texts: and what might this *notion* be — otherwise — called? Gumm, despite the seriousness of the case, wiggled in something like delight. "*Movable type!*" said Gumm.

Unmoved by the simple splendor of his vision — a mere four hundred years after its time — they had charged him, not with Theft, but with Sacrilege, it having after all been the *parson's* roof; and Gumm had been sentenced to recite The Ten Long Psalms three times a day for three years. *Without remission.*

Crime almost vanished from the Scythian Highlands.

Brozz began, perhaps inevitably, by saying that *Natura vacuum abhorret* (thus spake Aristotle — or would have, had Aristotle spoken Latin); then he said that Nature didn't either Abhor a Vacuum . . . or, perhaps, it was not quite clear, Nature *used* to abhor a vacuum but had been persuaded by scientific argument not to abhor one all that much. And he spoke about the Column of Mercury and the Column of Water and the Lift-Pump and about Galileo and Viviani and Toricelli and Pascal *father* and Pascal *son* and Air Pressure and Hydrostatics and Hydraulics and Equilibrium and the Experiment in the River and the Sea of Air and von Guericke and the Magdeburg Hemispheres and the Total Force and the Weight of Water and Athanasius Kircher and —

— and he spoke about the three kinds of well-known wheels and the vertical turbine and the hydraulic ram and something called "the Pelton wheel" which was anyway still in the planning stage —

— and Eszterhazy felt himself sitting on a bench in the Great Lecture Hall and listening again to the famous old Professor Kugelius delivering his famous old lecture series *On the Reconciliation of Aristotle and Plato*, concluding that, when all was said and done, Aristotle and Plato could not really be reconciled. . . .

Was Engineer Brozz more or less dotty than Gumm? His voice was

monotonous, but his voice was clear. His gestures may have been a bit jerky, but they were moderate gestures, and his words were those of someone speaking sanely on a sane subject — even if not quite persuasively. And the gestures directed attention to this feature and that of a model machine, small but functioning, which . . . when all was said and done and span and spun . . . wound a string which pulled a weight. And let it down. And pulled it up. And — After Brozz had said his say he was a moment silent. A flow of water was heard purling, somewhere very near. “Partly,” Brozz began again, “the machinery which you see is on such a small scale because the supply of running water is on such a small scale. Partly, it is because I lack capital to do anything on a larger scale.” De Metz again turned his bird-bright gaze upon Eszterhazy. *Investment possibility*, said the bird-bright gaze. “The ancient problem of the Archimedean Screw,” said Brozz, “before it was made practicable, I have so to speak turned inside-out. What was its fault, I have made into a strength. The rush of the water works the tuned harmonic turbine which then works the vacuum pump, and thence the compressed-air machine; the compressed-air machine is so clean;” but he began to repeat himself; and besides, his scientific principles seemed . . .

“‘Tuned harmonic turbine!’ ” exclaimed De Metz. “Music! Mathematic! Marvelous!”

“Well, Engineer Brozz! This is most interesting. Have you a printed brochure?” *Had* he not seen the man?

Engineer Brozz looked at him as though he had asked if he had a piece of the moon. Next he said, No he had not. And then, as an obvious afterthought, he said, But he had a letter-press copy of his Statement. Letter-press ink was liberally laced with sugar to keep it from drying rapidly, the paper thus written was covered with another sheet, of different paper, and the press . . . well . . . *pressed*. The ink made, of course, a reverse, a mirror-image, on the second sheet: but the paper of the second sheet was so thin that the copy was read from the obverse, as though it had been right-side up. The alternative was to photograph the original, which was technically possible but so tedious that it was seldom done — or, simply, to *copy* the copy. With pen and ink. Ordinary ink. Brozz did agree to allow Eszterhazy to have the letter-press copy transcribed. But he did not seem at all pleased to have to do so. De Metz might feel bright about the *investment possibility* involved, but, although Brozz had indeed mentioned being hampered by a lack of capital, he did not seem at all concerned with ways of meeting the problem. Eszterhazy was quite sure that the engineer was not engaged in cozenage of any sort, not playing the innocent sitting unsuspecting on a fortune. And Eszterhazy was now quite sure that he *had* seen him before.

“Engineer Brozz has shown me some of the figures involved,” De Metz said now. “Some of the physical calculations. I am sure they might form the basis of an extraordinary composition . . . though not one, of course, likely to be familiar to those of purely conventional musical taste. Harmony!

Tune! Turbine!"

Somewhere the town-clock sounded. Even in Klejn Tinkeldorff, Time did not stand still. And as Dr. Eszterhazy did not care to dismiss the matter by saying something along the lines of, *You are both too naïf to be left at large for long*, and as he could think of nothing else to say to Brozz which would be neither a lie nor an insincerity, he now said, "You asked me to remind you, *cher maître* De Metz, to tell me a very amusing story about . . . a Gypsy and a —?"

At once the musician's mask broke into a thousand lines of laughter. "Ah yes!" he cried. "Ah yes! I forget just when it happened. It happened around here, in this picturesque little hamlet. A certain family had a Gypsy working for it and he had his chores and one of them was to skim cream from the milk-pans in the spring-house and ladle it into the crock. You understand. And of course he was most very strictly forbidden to drink any of the cream himself. So. So one day he comes into the spring-house and what does he discover, he discovers that a mouse has gotten into the milk-pan! And drowned! What does he do?" Eszterhazy, smiling, lightly shook his head to indicate his inability to guess what does the Gypsy do; De Metz began to show what, by gesture and by mime. First the Gypsy showed puzzlement. Then surprise. Then — something must after all be done — resolution. De Metz, in the character of *Yanosh*, leaned over, picked up an invisible mouse by its invisible tail, began to throw it away, and then, bringing it level with his face, thrust out his tongue, and — slurp! slurp — and then threw it away.

"Oh ho ho! Ah ha ha! *First* he licked the cream off it! And *then* he threw it away! Oo hoo hoo!"

Eszterhazy chuckled. Engineer Brozz observed, "These Gypsies, they are all such children of nature." A faint, very faint smile, creased his thin and rather weary-looking features. What [it asked], what are Gypsies, mice, and cream to one who lacked capital to prove the larger capacities of the tuned harmonic turbine and compressed-air pump, so potentially efficient in getting energy out of small mountain streams with very high heads of water?

One more call to make. Some of the houses were painted white, some chocolate-brown, some blue, pink, green. And in one of the white ones, with blue trim around the carved window-frames, dwelt the doctor's grandmother's first cousin, Christina Augusta, Tanta Tina. God knows what she might do, were he to ride past her house and *not* go in. Wait till the christening of his first-born child (he was not married) and then appear to utter murrains on everyone's cattle, and blights on all their crops; perhaps. Tanta Tina belonged to an age gone by in more than mere generation; she dressed in the costume of her youth; she had few teeth; she had moles and a slight, white moustache. She and the Emperor Ignats Louis were god-sib. She called him "Loysheck." He called her "Sissy." She did not ever go to Court. And she did not know a word of French.

Well, that is not entirely correct. She knew three.

First she embraced him, then she blessed him, then she fondly stroked his beard. "My dearest little cousin-child," she said, at length, "I shall bring you a cup of *café au lait*. And a piece of gingerbread."

The coffee, in a sense, was already made. But not the *café au lait*. The beans had to come a long way, from Mocha and from Java (described by her as lying "in the lands of the Turks"), in order to be purchased under Tanta Tina's eyes, roasted under Tanta Tina's eyes, ground under Tanta Tina's eyes, and then subjected to an almost alchemical process of . . . almost . . . distillation under Tanta Tina's eyes. Tanta Tina next allowed the coffee to cool and then supervised its being decanted into wide-mouthed glass bottles which, each strictly rotated, remained three days each in the moist cool of the spring-house; the fluid was then poured off the dregs and set to heat in one pan while the milk was heating in another. A dash of cinnamon (fresh-ground), the contents of the two pots commingled at just the right moment: cool slightly, and drink. Who has never drunk *café au lait* made after the manner of Tanta Tina may indeed have drunk coffee and milk. But he or she has never drunk *café au lait*. And as for a mouse drowning in the cream of the milk with which Tanta Tina made the *café au lait*, no mouse would dare. As for the gingerbread —

"Ha, Tanta Tina, I am reminded of a capital story which I just heard today," and he told it to her, complete with gesture and mime. The old woman laughed heartily; then she said, Ah the poor creature. And when he asked, *Did she mean the Gypsy or the mouse?*, she laughed heartily all over again, then wiped her eyes on her apron, made of hundred-year-old lace the like of which is never made more. And her little cousin-child lifted the gingerbread, sniffed it with zest, smiled . . . what would they say, in fashionable circles, nibbling their *petits-fours*, if they were to see him about to bite into something as peasant-simple as a gingerbread-man? . . . well, he did not care; he need not care, any more than Tanta Tina; and he knew it and he knew they knew it, too. Then, as his tongue and teeth did their work, he was aware of his experiencing something quite different, quite, well, *better*, than he had expected. He felt his face change.

"It's good, isn't it, Little Engli?"

"But this is extraordinarily good! Is it some new recipe?" Even as he asked, he thought how unlikely it would be if this old woman were to try a new recipe.

She thought it unlikely, too. "*Tchah!* A new recipe? From the Old Avar Bakery?" Her tone revealed the all but impossibility of the Old Avar Bakery making anything from a new recipe. Assuming Charles XII, the Swedish "Lion of the North," to have paused long enough in his impetuous ride through the old kingdoms of Scythia and Pannonia to have sampled something from the Avar Bakery; and assuming him to rise from the dead and, returning to sample the same item from the same bakery today, he of "that

Name at which the World grew pale" would find the item tasting exactly the same as it had tasted a century and a half before. The Swedish Lion had defeated Danes, Russians, Poles, Turks, sweeping almost insanelly across the European continent —

"You can't catch *me*, said the gingerbread-man," Eszterhazy exclaimed, the line coming suddenly into his mind. But a sniper's ball had caught the Lion, at last, in Norway, "on a mean Strand."

"What is that you say, my child?"

He laughed, shortly. "Oh, just something from a children's tale. I learned it long ago, from my English aunt —"

Ah, his English aunt. *Meesis* Emma. And how was *Meesis* Emma? He gave an account of the English Lady Emma Eszterhazy, and then his talk ebbed a moment into silence. He lifted up the remnants of the gingerbread, and, in the silence (. . . had an angel flown overhead? announcing, as the Moslems say, *One God* . . . ?), he heard the old woman murmur, "There is a spirit in this man . . ." And it was his turn to ask, "What is that?"

She blinked, laughed lightly, brushed the matter away with her withered hand. "So my old nurse used to say. I don't know what she meant. You say you like it, but you do not finish? So. A late lunch? An early dinner? Never mind. Let me wrap it up for you to take. The good Lord and Our Lady alone know what they give you to eat in Bella; is it quite wholesome? Yes? Not just foreign kickshaws, I hope?"

Almost back home, the odor of fresh-baked bread brought the matter to his mind again. Where was the — Ah. There. He dismounted, entered the corner bread-shop. Had they gingerbread? They had; he took it. Then he forgot it, until, later on, back home at 33 Turkling Street, the slightly unfamiliar weight in each of his pockets reminded him. Really, he mused, looking down, there was not much comparison. The gingerbread man from the antique Avar Bakery, broken though it was, was a sort of modest masterpiece. The outline was as crude as a child's drawing. There was a currant for each eye, two for nostrils to indicate a nose, and a short row of them for teeth. The one from the neighborhood was elaborately confected with brightly-colored sugar icing in several hues. But it was soggy. And its taste was nothing. Let one of the servants remove it and give it to a child. Absent-mindedly he finished nibbling the broken bits from the Avar Bakery. It was good, it was good, it was very, very good. And as the taste filled his mouth, his mind filled with some vague thoughts not unconnected with it.

*You can't catch me, said the gingerbread-man.*

*There is a spirit in this man . . .*

In came his servant with a small tray; on the tray an *apéritif*. "Ah, good. Ah. I shan't want this piece of pastry."

Would his Romanou valet lick the cream off a dead mouse before throwing it away? Possibly he might lick the cream off it even if someone else had thrown it away, unlicked.

Or even half-licked.

Ah, well.

Another day. Eszterhazy afoot. A woman called out, not especially to him, automatically, " 'Llyri' an' th' 'Talian 'Lliance . . . 'Llyri' an' th' 'Talian 'Lliance . . . Press, Print, 'Zette. . . " Elsewhere in the world, newspapers may have been hawked by newsboys — some of them, Dr. Eszterhazy had observed in his travels, rather well on into rather mature boyhood — in Bella the trade was largely in the hands of soldiers' widows. True, pensions had . . . eventually . . . been instituted; true, pensions had . . . eventually . . . been increased . . . but when it had been hinted that the newswives might now tacitly retire and allow others to take this corner pitch and that: nothing like it! Wrapped in threadbare Army horse-blankets and with their late husbands' medals pinned to their bosoms, they had marched — wailing — to the Ministry of War. *Had* the Minister hidden cravenly beneath his great mahogany desk? *Had* the Imperial Presence drawn his sword and stamped his foot and shouted that the newswidows *must* be allowed, etc.? Who could really say. The women still sat on their stools, still shortchanged their customers, still endured heat and cold, still chanted headlines they often did not understand, and still offered for sale papers which they themselves could often neither read nor wished to learn to read.

Half-automatically this one now held a *Gazette* out to Eszterhazy, half-automatically he gave her a coin and took the paper. He did not greatly desire it. He was not by any means a fanatical nationalist or imperialist, but he certainly preferred to see his own country's flag flying over his own country rather than that of — say — Austria-Hungary, Russia, or Turkey. The news-vendor's late husband may have died in battle or he may have been, whilst drunk, kicked to death by an angry mule. The price of a paper was a very small price.

*Illyria and the Italian Alliance.* Happy, happy Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania, to be fretted by small Illyria! All through the Dog Days and the Silly Season, not over-scrupulous editors would sell off an otherwise perhaps-unsalable edition by smearing a quarter of a page with, in large type, **ILLYRIA AND THE ITALIAN ALLIANCE**. There was somehow a feeling that Illyria ought not to *have* an alliance and that if Illyria nevertheless felt that it must have one, it bloody well ought to have one with Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania. And as Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania had never had an alliance with Italy, why should Illyria have one? The logic of this seemed irrefutable. At least in Bella. As for the King of Illyria, Kyryl II Mettodio, whose nose (admittedly rather long) had always been good for an affectionate jest in the Bellanese music halls, why, it was to be feared that His Adriatic Majesty's veracity was now come to be questioned on the local musical stage; and that he was even occasionally nowadays being referred to there as King Pinocchio.

Tut-tut.

Eszterhazy gave the front page a glance which was reflexive rather than reflective and had half-folded it again; half he would throw it away, half he would tuck it under his arm for later; he took a half-step forward. He stopped. What. Why. Ah. There *had* been something on that damned page after all. Damn. Much better to have nothing but advertizements on the front page. For Sale, Fine Landau-Barouche. Otto Come Home All Is Forgiven. Philanthropic Gentleman Desires Make Loan to Young Woman in Good Health. — What had it been which had caught his eye . . . aye, and stuck in like a piece of grit . . . ? Of course he could not say. Well . . . a sigh . . . there was nothing for it; he sat down at a bench outside a rough tavern-cum-cookshop which catered to the needs of the coach-for-hire drivers. He was opening the paper when a not very clean apron stopped in front of him. Without looking up, Eszterhazy said, "The usual." When he glanced up, the apron had gone. No waiter would sink pride and admit he did not remember a regular customer . . . which Eszterhazy was certainly not. *Illyria and the* — oh, blast and damn *Illyria and the Italian Alliance!*

The answer seemed to be, he was obliged finally to admit, that there were *two* somethings. And he would perhaps never be able to learn if he had noticed one before the other, perhaps the two had been read simultaneously; it did not matter. OUTRAGE AT THE SACRED GROVE was one. VERY IMPORTANT NEW INVENTION was the other. Someone, whilst putting an axe to a tree in the so-called Sacred Grove of the Olden-Time Goths at the headwaters of the Little River had had his head cloven by another axe. There was considerable unrest among the peasants. Huh. He had notes at home on the subject of the so-called Sacred Grove, etcetera, both from ancient and from modern writers. Hum. Well, he could cut this out and compare it and add it to the collection. As for the Very Important New Invention . . . :

The *Gazette* is able to inform its readers that a very important new invention has been perfected by a subject of the Triune Monarchy which will probably result in our country becoming a most prominent industrial consideration in the economy of Europe. Engineer H. V. Borits Brozz, a resident of the charming little suburb of Klejn Tinkeldorff, has perfected an engine which operates on water and air. The new engine does not require horse-power or steam. As neither wood nor coal is employed for fuel . . .

Eszterhazy swore very silently. Every practitioner in stock trickery, every promoter of fake companies and worthless schemes, would be sure to get involved in this fine-tuned harmonic hobby-horse, mare's nest, wild-goose chase, what-one-might-call-it. True — and fortunately — there were not many such in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania. But that might leave a



clearer field for those there were. At that moment the waiter, saying, "Two kopperkas, sir boss," set something on the unclothed table. And Eszterhazy in a flash realized just how the *Gazette* had got hold of the story: De Metz was a friend of the musical critic of the *Gazette* and told it to him, and he in turn had passed it on to his editor. De Metz knew as much about engineering as Brozz did about music. The bee of *Investment Possibility* had entered his bonnet, and who could say how long it was going to buzz there? Perhaps forever. Certainly — in theory — the harmonic turbine had a potential. Certainly the compressed-air engine had a potential. In theory. So, in the time of Cardinal Richelieu, had the steam-boiler had a theoretical potential. It had since had two hundred years to develop from a toy suspected of sorcery into the immense engines which sped o'er Land and Ocean without rest. Even electricity had grown from a key on a kite in a rainstorm to something which now began, seemingly, to demonstrate a possible potential capable of perhaps rivaling steam.

*What good is your new invention?*

*What good is a new-born baby?*

But surely Engineer Brozz's new model engine, for all its high-toned harmonic title, was now merely at the toy stage, doing nothing more than winding a cord which lifted and then lowered a very small weight. Would it have its century? If the idea got into the hands of scoundrel speculators might not the idea be driven from sight and thought, to lie buried in the Urn for its own several centuries? Well, perhaps that might be what it needed. Meanwhile there were after all and always many other new inventions.

What the waiter had set down was borsht. *Cabbage-borsht.*

Wasn't bad. *The usual.* Ha!

But . . . *where* had he seen Brozz before?

The Scotch had not conquered the English nor had the English conquered the Scotch in order for one sovereign to become King of England and King of Scotland and — eventually — King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain. What had brought it about was, firstly, the Scottish marriage of King Henry's sister, and, secondly, the not-marriage of King Henry's daughter: *the Queen of Scots hath a bonny babe and I am but a barren stock.* Neither had any wars at last united Scythia and Pannonia; the Pannonians at a certain point historical had no Crown-Prince? Well, neither had they any Salic Law: the then-Crown-Prince of Scythia was wedded to the then-Crown-Princess of Pannonia; both being tactful enough to die before their conjoint-grandchild, said grandchild became Sovereign of both Scythia and Pannonia — and what school-child anywhere did not know that the people of Scythia were (principally) Goths and that the people of Pannonia were (principally) Avars? *What* an occasion for the erasure of frontiers, the unification of armies, the abolition of customs and octrois! There were, however, also all those lesser, minor territories, of which the new Sovereign was

Prince of one and Duke of another . . . in the Scythian Line of Descent . . . Grand Hetman here and Chief Boyar there . . . in the Pannonian Line of Descent . . . and so on . . . and so on. What to do about them, these not-quite-nations already becoming obsolete in an age where every political entity was felt to require a prime minister, a general staff, a set of postage stamps, a — What was done was perhaps cleverer than students of political science realized, for all these “Hegemonies,” as they were called, from Ritchli to Little Great Dombróvia to Hyperborea, and including Vlox-Majore and Vlox-Minore, were not absorbed by either Scythia or Pannonia, but were autonomously united to form *Transbalkania*.

The result, rather to the surprise of the gathering which assembled to form the (as it was popularly called forever) “the Big Union,” the result was an Empire . . .

And now the cheese of Poposhki, the smoked sturgeon of the Romanou, the brined-pork and the brawn of the Slovatchko Alps, appeared . . . *untaxed!* . . . on the market-stalls of Bella — Avar-Ister — Apolograd — and everywhere else in the fourth-largest empire in Europe. (The Turks were only fifth. Served them right.) Also the wheat of Scythia and the beef & mutton of the wide Pannonian plains. And, as Dr. Englebert Eszterhazy composed this paean in his own mind and looked at the ever-thronging streets of what, once a walled town, was now a world capital (yes, it was a small world), he considered the role which he himself would play. Which he had intended he should play and had designed (re-designed) his own life the better to play it. You can’t catch me, said —

Something light as a feather brushed Eszterhazy’s mind. He knew that, usually, he had only to wait a bit, emptying his mind of other things and that fairly soonly whatever the new thought was would silently enter and fill the space. He was mildly surprised that what came, soon enough, to fill the space, was the thought, *newspaper cuttings*. There was a plain, shallow box of some exotic wood on a shelf near his desk and in it he was accustomed to place any quick-cut items from periodicals which he had not immediately time to dispose of more thoroughly; he rose and looked. Sure enough. From the *Gazette*. VERY IMPORTANT NEW INVENTION was one. That would go under, hm, under, ha ha, *Invention*. In his scrapbooks. With a cross-reference under *Science*. And under *Commerce*? He chuckled. “Investment possibility,” ha! And now for the other items so casually cut out a while ago, OUTRAGE AT THE SACRED GROVE. Someone, whilst putting an axe to a tree in the so-called Sacred Grove of the Olden-Time Goths at the headwaters of the Little River had had his head cloven by another axe. There was considerable unrest among the peasants. *This one* —

*This one* would require cross-references under *History*, *Ethnology*, *National*, *Goths*, *Religion*, *Little River*, and — what for its main classification? And did he really want to bother with all of it now? Ought he not now, *now*, in fact, to be in his music-room, doing work on the Mixo-Lyidian

Mode or the Later Italian Harpsichordists? Was music and mathematic really the same thing? How one thought led so easily, swiftly, to another! — and yet and still the feather brushed his mind; what, what? Why? Was there, then, more to it than merely boxing the *newspaper cuttings*? Evidently. So much as a sigh he allowed himself, then he went to looking up things in his books, not his scrapbooks, though perhaps he might find himself in them before he was finished.

The so-called *Addendum to Procopius* had been printed once, at Leipzig, perhaps fifty years ago; but the text was defective. Eszterhazy had tracked down the original, was able to satisfy himself that it had not been forged by the notorious Simonides — who knew more, probably, about Old Greek Paleography than the old Greek paleographers had known, and did such things as much for pleasure as for profit . . . if not more — and had it painstakingly photographed. It was a very late Byzantine MS, full of abbreviations, ligatures, and flourishes (and lacunae and, more simply, *holes*); and it had taken Eszterhazy a long time to establish exactly what was the text: then he had translated it himself. The Faculty of the University of Bella, to whom anything in the way of a Greek text even as late as the New Testament was of but moderate interest, had ignored his work. But he had received letters (one each from Caius College at Cambridge, St. Andrew's in Scotland, and Kansas near Kickapoo in the American Province of Mid-vest) with such praise as more than made up for local neglect. So:

Another reason which justified Justinian's waging war upon the Goths was their savage rites and customs, totally against religion and morality. For example, in the mountains of Eastern Scythia in a sacred grove by a sacred well or spring, the barbaric Goths are wont to select certain prisoners by lot and to let them loose and to pursue after them. The wretches unfortunate enough to be captured are not alone immolated [*immolated*, an interesting word, although of course *all* words were interesting; why not more simply say *sacrificed*? *Immolate* . . . *mol* . . . *mol* . . . surely a cognate with the Magyar *molnar*, miller? and with what else? *Meal*? *Mill*? With a click of his tongue he reached for the dictionary, *immolate*: ah, here: *im-mo-late*, verb transitive, from Latin *immolatus*, past participle of *immolare*, *in* + *mola*, spelt grits; from the custom of sprinkling victims with sacrificial meal; akin to Latin *molere* to grind — see *MILL*. 1. to offer in sacrifice; especially to slay as a sacrificial victim. 2. *KILL, DESTROY*. . . *Hmm. Hmm. Interesting. Very interesting. Now back to the text.*] immolated to the demons who dwelt in the place sacred to them, but portions of their flesh are cooked and eaten. Others say, eaten raw. It is true that some so-called Christians who should know better maintain that though such a cruel rite once pertained there, it had been abolished after the Gothic incursion, and that the Goths themselves

merely made effigies of meal and honey and it is these which they consume. Shame upon the so-called Christians who presume to speak well of the enemies of God and the Empire, they are probably Monophysites or Pelagians, may they be accursed and may they all be burnt alive.

Eszterhazy gave a snort of rueful amusement. The *Addendum* may not have been, probably was not, authentic. This of course did not mean that there had been no Goths, no Justinian, and so on; and certainly it did not mean that there had been "in the mountains of Eastern Scythia" no sacred grove, no sacred spring or well. In fact, it was rather sure that there had been. Very likely: more than one. Of each. Of most, reference to the precise site had been lost to both oral and written tradition, and of those sites of which this may not have been so, only one was still known as, and still regarded as, "the Sacred Grove." It was near the headwaters of the Little River. One might have liked it better if the (so-called) *Addendum* — probably never written by Procopius, that spiteful, scandal-loving lawyer — had made a definite reference to a river. One could not have everything. And anyway, the absence of such a reference was a sort of testimony to some sort of authenticity of the text: that the MS was of late Byzantine times did not mean it had been authored in late Byzantine times; had this been so, it likely *would* have mentioned a river, in order to add verisimilitude. No . . . probably it was older than the Middle Ages, if not (perhaps) as old as Justinian and Procopius, and its author, whoever its author had been, merely repeated what others had said. And others had not been interested in providing geographical coördinates.

What then? about the Sacred Grove? Of *the* Sacred Grove?

Eszterhazy had been there, once, briefly. Though the oaks were indeed massy and ancient, of course they could hardly have been *that* ancient. He thought once of the lines of the English poet, Chaucer:

*a grove, standing in a vale*

This grove was indeed standing in a vale; it was deeply sunken into the vale. The spring was still there. The river was not the Little River, it was one of its tributaries. A Christian shrine, itself of great antiquity, was there; but the attempt to take the pagan quality away had hardly succeeded. Had not, certainly, entirely succeeded. On every bush and low tree round about, and on whatever low-enough branches of the higher trees, was tied a profusion, a multitude of bright-colored rags, strips of cloth. The people came and the people said their prayers by the proper shrine. And then the people went and made their wishes, and as they did this they tied a strip of bright cloth to a branch. It was a custom so old that it had passed out of anyone's power to rationalize.

So no one tried.

The air was certainly one of more than merely immemorial antiquity. In

the shade of the huge trees one felt intimations of things to which the rosary, the Pater Noster and Ave Maria, hardly seemed to apply. Of course the pilgrims, if so they might be called, hardly could have thought so. From time to time relics of the Bronze Age had been found there. Relics of the Stone Age had been found there, and Eszterhazy wondered if these flint knives, mostly now in fragments, had immolated any of the victims in the ancient and horrid rites which had certainly antedated the Goths, to say nothing of the Avars, who had later come to conquer . . . and had stayed . . . and still came and still stayed . . . to pray. One did after all feel something there which one did after all not feel somewhere else. If there were not actually dryads in the oaks, not really naiads in the spring or pool or river, well, then of course, one could not really feel them. But for thousands of years, people had come and had emotional experiences there and had believed that there *were* dryads in the trees and naiads in the spring and pool and stream. And so perhaps it was *that* which one felt.

Because, to be sure, one felt *something*.

And as for the incident mentioned in the cutting from the *Gazette* newspaper? Well, there was a superstition that wood fallen from the trees in the Sacred Grove should not be taken from the Sacred Grove. Once a year, at least once a year, certainly on or very near Midsummer's Night, great fires were made of all the wind-fall wood — otherwise the place might have become impenetrable. Heathen would not wish to take wood away, because it was sacred; Christians not, because it was, after all, sacred to heathen gods and spirits. It had long been good church doctrine; was it still (he wondered, as the gaslights hissed in the gasolier in his study) good church doctrine that the heathen gods had indeed existed and had been demons? And it was certainly contrary to some deeply-felt regional feeling, call it superstition, that no tree in the Sacred Grove should *ever* be felled —

— furthermore, it was, the entire area and for a league, say rather *leagues*, round about, the property of Prince Preez, who had very stern rules regarding the felling of *any* of his trees — the killing of any of his game — the taking of any of his fish —

But there is perhaps scarcely any rule which someone will not try to break, if it is to someone's interest to break it. Oaken timber had a price, and it was inevitable that from time to time someone would try to earn that price. It was not clear from the paragraph in the *Gazette* which was considered the outrage, the attempted cutting-down of the tree or the successful cutting-down of the attemptor? Or just why there was considerable unrest among the peasants: though presumably in connection with the matter of the tree and the manslaughter.

Well, well, he would try to follow it up; meanwhile he carefully scissored the rough edges of the knife-cut newspaper items, neatly pasted them in their proper places in the scrapbooks, neatly made his cross-references. So much of this was in his head anyway that it wasn't something it would do to

depend on a secretary for; and besides: he had no secretary. Though perhaps some day. Meanwhile, and quite apart from the intrinsic value of what he was doing, the storing-up of knowledge as a part of his life-plan, Dr. Eszterhazy found now (as always) that there was a simple and a rather restorative pleasure in doing such simple tasks as using the scissors and applying the paste. If this was — and it was — rather childlike, what of it? There was, after all, a child in everyone; better to minister to it in such harmless and helpful ways.

Just as he was closing the scrapbook there caught his eye the headline, VERY IMPORTANT NEW INVENTION. And, as before, he chuckled.

Fairly soon, however: there it was again.

Arriving for his regular session in Composition, Eszterhazy was met as usual by the housekeeper; and, as usual, she curtsied to him. Then, not as usual, she said, "Master has left word, sir, will you be pleased to go over and meet him at Engineer Brozz's place, behind, in th' old cow-house and spring-house as they've had the builders throw together and they calls it the lavatory."

They were both there in the laboratory. Something had been added, Eszterhazy felt certain, but he was not yet aware what it was. As before, Brozz looked rather weary; as before, De Metz had his head cocked to one side. Greetings exchanged, De Metz, evidently acting as spokesman, said, "It was felt that perhaps the new invention did not sufficiently demonstrate the," and here he paused a second, "*prac-tic-al application* of the invention. Of the tuned harmonic turbine and compressed-air pump. So. Doctor. Therefore —"

Brozz said, rather as one who speaks as it were weary of having spoken the same thing again and again, almost dreamily said, "It is so clean . . . so clean . . . no fire, no smoke, no ash — Ah. Yes. Instructor De Metz has been kind enough to make some practical suggestions, of the most helpful sort." Sunlight diffused from the whitewashed walls, emphasizing here a ridge and there a whorl in the plaster covering the brick and stone. As though making some sort of effort, Brozz cleared his throat, lifting his head; muscles worked in his lean throat. "Instructor De Metz has assisted me to devise a small device which will —"

"But show him, *show him*, my dear Brozz!"

There was a flurry of apologetic sounds. Brozz moved levers. He turned wheels. The sound of water purling became the sound of water gurgling. Rushing. Brozz made one final movement and pulled a bar. By this time Eszterhazy had noticed the box, of wood and metal, which had not been there before: *this* was the something different, something new. And as the bar settled down into its altered position, there was a distinct *click*. And from the box, with sounds emulating those of the flute, the small drum, the mouth-organ, there came forth the very specific music of the *Imperialushk*,

the National Anthem of Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania: *May Providence Protect Our Royal and Imperial Sovereign From Agues, Plagues, Jacobins, and Wends; And, Indeed, From All Other Afflictions Whatsoever.* Commonly called, for purposes of brevity, the *Imperialushk*.

(Quite another name had originally followed *Jacobins*, also a name of a single syllable, but political considerations indicated that it would be more tactful to substitute the name of a people which did not have a standing army.)

As the last notes — those which would accompany the words, *and even to the humblest grant him and/or her the slice of bread with goosegrease* — died away, Eszterhazy was moved to clap his hands: of course no more appropriate after an Anthem than after a hymn. He said, and said quite sincerely, “Charming. Quite charming.” The matter of why it was better to have the music performed by water-powered vacuum pump “and/or” compressed air when music-boxes had done it perfectly well by clockwork . . . and clockwork, after all, operates even during a drought . . . was quite beside the point. Although . . . to be sure . . . a regular music-box might not have done the flute and mouth-organ quite as well.

At once De Metz asked, “And to whom else shall we show this?” He did not add, *investment possibility*. He did not need to.

Eszterhazy rubbed the end of his slightly-pointed nose. “Hm. Let me think. Ah. Have you considered Nuszbaum’s Arcade?”

They had not considered Nuszbaum’s Arcade. They considered it now. De Metz gave an entire sequence of his birdy-nods. Brozz said, “I have often enjoyed watching some of the machines and automata in the Arcade. I have no doubt that the principles of the tuned, harmonic, water-powered, turbine and compressed-air pump might be successfully applied to them, at any rate to some of them, and of course on a much larger scale.” It was clear that they liked the idea.

It was clear, very soon, that Nuszbaum liked it, too. Nuszbaum made an arrangement with the inventor, Nuszbaum provided space for the invention next to his Test-the-Electricity Machine and just after his Slightly Naughty Magic Zoöscope Lantern Peep (fat women in corsets). And in front of the Arcade, Nuszbaum posted two masterpieces of posters appearing to be immense enlargements of the small item on the front page of the *Gazette* which had attracted Eszterhazy’s attention: IMPORTANT NEW INVENTION: actually, both posters had been painted by the famous Master Sign-Painter Adler. How many people saw them and how many had read them and how many people had been intrigued by them enough to go inside, no one could say. But somebody had gone inside. And somebody was not even interested in testing the Electrical Machine or peeping into the Zoöscope Lantern . . . which was just fine with those who were, tinsmiths and plasterers and other such subjects of the Triune Monarchy whose wives were just as fat but never wore corsets . . . and someone asked a question or so of Nuszbaum and

obtained an answer. And so, *then* —

"And how is our friend Engineer Brozz?" — one day.

"Quite well. He has gone away to set up his full-scale water engine."

Eszterhazy was astonished. "He *has*?"

"Oh yes. Someone is interested in investment possibility." Eszterhazy asked just enough questions as to reassure himself that Someone was not a cheapjack or mounteback or floater of bogus shares; Someone was *not*. And further than that, Eszterhazy did not ask and De Metz did not offer and their conversation continued on into a very technical discussion of counterpoint and polyphony. And presently the season of the lessons with De Metz was over and the season for a holiday in the country was at hand, and whilst Eszterhazy was botanizing amidst the crags and high valleys and wildwoods of Little Byzantia, the matter of Engineer Brozz left his mind, and left it as completely (one might think) as though it had never been in it. When next he was in "Big Bella" the mock-newspaper posters were no longer up in front of Nuszbaum's Arcade and he had forgotten that they had ever been up. The matter occurred to him, vaguely, when he received the customary letter of felicitation from De Metz upon the award of the Doctorate in Music; but it was very vague indeed. On the vacation following, Eszterhazy went geologizing in the mountains behind Nimtsoran: and nothing there reminded him of Brozz, or of the vacuum-pump and the compressed-air engine. But on the vacation after *that* —

This time Eszterhazy took the Limited Express to Numbitszl, in the Avar Alps, from Numbitszl the mule-drawn diligence went to Gro, and at Gro he was met by a smart mountain wagon; its brightly-painted signs showed a figure with a halo who was mounted on something like a short-legged horse with a ruff of hair around its neck: this was Saint Mammas. *Put a lion on Mammas!* the heathen throng in the amphitheater had shouted, and this was done. Mammas had preached to the lion, Mammas had so to speak converted the lion, and Mammas had calmly ridden out of the arena mounted on the lion. — So at least the legend said, and if orthodox church historiographers and hagiographers said anything different, no one in the Avar Alps knew or cared. And it was at the piously-named (and well-appointed and well-run) Inn of St. Mammas that Eszterhazy was going to stay. For a full fortnight he might not even see a musical score or hear a musical instrument . . . except perhaps a peasant on the zither or the penny-whistle or the woodenhorn.

The road went around and around and up and up and up, the air was clean and clear, not alone different from the thicker air of the city of Bella but certainly far different from the air in the train. In theory the train-carriage's windows were sealed, but the black soot seeped in anyway, and the air grew hot and stale, and if one opened the windows then the smoke from the engine rushed in, and in addition to grime on one's face there was the inevitable cinder in one's eye. Cinders. Eyes. But here all was clean. By the side



of the narrow, winding road grew yellow wood-sorrel and the blue blossoms of the cornflower and the blue blue blooms of the chicory.

From the balcony of his two-and-one-half-room suite Eszterhazy could see a broken silver line: the Little River and its several falls, and — past that — the unbroken silver line of the broad ox-bow in its lower course. Eszterhazy's Romanou valet had been given the fortnight off; and he himself was now being tended to by the inn's servants, and tended to well enough; very well, he had to shave himself or submit to the unsophisticated ministrations of the village barber? Tut.

He rode the small rough horses of the mountains, he rode their rough large ponies, once or twice he rode their rusty-colored mules. And he walked. He walked and walked, sometimes botanizing, sometimes bird-watching, sometimes photographing. His face grew red, then brown; his nerves, calmer . . . he had hardly realized that they had been otherwise. And then one night he said, more as a vocal expression of good spirits than an actual question, "Well, landlord, and what shall I do tomorrow?"

Barrel-bodied, immaculately-aproned, vastly-bearded and broadly-moustached, Karrólo the innkeeper answered, "Why, sir doctor sir, a party of the gentry be going cross the frontier a-morrow, and I do wonder if you be not wanting to go with'um."

*The frontier*; there had been no "frontier," even officially, since the Great Unification ("The Big Union"), but old manners of speech . . . and of thought, which gives utterance to speech, *That which has no form of its own giving it to that which becomes formed* . . . died hard. When (here in this remote area) they ever died at all. "Going from the Avar Land into Scythia, are they?" he asked, lazily stretching before the fire on which a red-hearted chestnut log burned. "Where there?"

The answer checked his lazy stretch. "Why, sir doctor sir, to the Sacred Grove."

How could this be? The Sacred Grove was far away. It was. Was it not? A moment's reflection showed him that, really, it was not. *He* had gone there before, from Bella: a longish trip. He had come *here*, from Avar-Ister — another longish trip. But from exactly *here*, St. Mammas's Inn, to *there*, the Sacred Grove, was not really that far at all. Eszterhazy had not come to St. Mammas's Inn in Pannonia directly from Bella in Scythia, because there was no direct railroad connection, and even sufficient connection via diligence — "stage coach," they called it in Northamerica — was lacking. But rapidly he conjectured vision of a map, from here to there was but a small way indeed. He might easily go. Why should he not go? He could think of no reason why not. "Yes, Karrólo, I think it an excellent idea. Have them pack me some food . . . and a little brandy."

Idly, he picked up the Avar-Ister newspaper, and turned to the classified notices. He made a mark in a margin.

\* \* \*

The picnic went well enough. Karrólo would have felt his house disgraced if there had not been the usual seven sorts of sausages, seven kinds of cheese, and seven of pickled things and seven of pastry. In order to minister to the possibly more finicking tastes of the gentry, Hanni, his wife, who had worked a while in Avar-Ister (sometimes called "the Paris of the Balkans" by people who had spent more time in the Balkans than in Paris . . . a lot more), had prepared *sandwhishkas* — thin slices of this and that between thin slices of bread. She had even made cucumber *sandwhishkas*, though her failure to peel the cucumbers occasioned mild merriment.

"Such a lot of gingerbread," said one of the ladies.

"It is traditional," explained one of the men.

*There is a spirit in this man; whatever did that mean?*

The air grew rather hot, but there in the shady grove it stayed cool. Now and then a breeze brought wafts of resin from the pines round about. "Look what I've got on my shoe," a young girl whimpered. Her mother made an exclamation of disgust, said that there must be a dog around. One of the guests laughed.

"Not at all," he said. "It is merely some old gingerbread. And the rain and dew have made it soggy. People come here all the time. And every time, they bring gingerbread."

Eszterhazy said, "I don't wonder, it is such good gingerbread. I only wonder that so much of it seems to be lying around, instead of having been all eaten up. Why is that?"

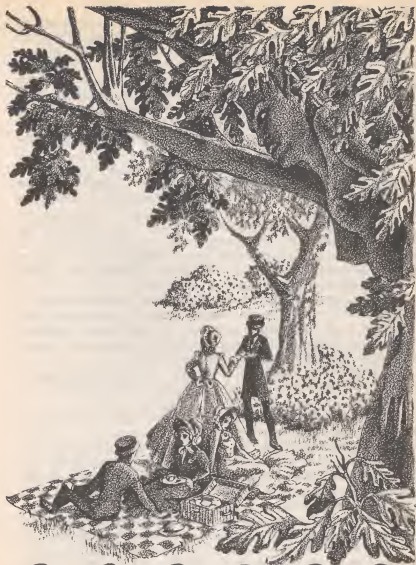
The same man said, "It is traditional." And then, with a gesture, he said, "Look!"

Some distance away the employees of the Inn were also eating. While they watched, the blackbearded coachman took up his piece of gingerbread, broke off a piece, placed it on the ground, straightened up, began to eat the rest. "Why?" asked a lady. And, "Yes, why? Ask him why, do," said the other ladies.

The same man raised his voice, called out, "Hoy, Coachie!" in his citified Avar. "Why do you put a piece of such good gingerbread on the ground to get mucked about? Are you feeding the stoats and the fieldmice?"

It took a while for "Coachie" to understand. Then, with an obvious intention to be respectful, he made an obvious attempt to answer. But he felt awkward; the words stuck in his throat; he made gestures; finally, in a voice too low to carry, he said a word or two in the rustic dialect to the woman serving as waitress. She nodded, walked back to the picnickers, curtsied. "If it do please Your Honors, Ferri he say it be the custom."

This would not do. Not altogether. A woman asked, *Why* was it the custom? Another demanded to be told. *What* did the custom *mean*? "Coachie," not prepared to deal with the recondite matters, scratched his head, scratched his chin, had begun to scratch his armpits: stopped, under some dim apprehension that this was a gesture not socially accepted on all levels



of society. All he had wanted to do, really, was drive his coach, tend his horses, eat his victuals, and leave a piece of his gingerbread in the grasses where bloomed the blue cornflower and where the blue chicory blossom blew. And while he thus floundered, the man who had first addressed him, perhaps from pity, perhaps from condescension, said, "Ah, the peasantry, they have their own lot of customs sure enough; for example, when the man comes in from his work, he —" His mouth continued to move but his voice had quite stopped; he grew very red in the face: Eszterhazy, whose own sympathy for the coachman had begun to be aroused, now transferred it to the nearer and more immediately necessitous.

"My legs are stiff from riding and then sitting," said Eszterhazy, getting up awkwardly enough to lend credence to his remark. "A brisk walk is what they need; will you come along for a walk with me, my dear sir? — and point out things to me?"

The man scrambled to his feet, brushed his legs. "Love to," he muttered, avoiding eyes. "Love, love to . . . love to . . ."

When they were off by themselves, hot sun breathing down, the odor of grass replacing that of leaves and resin and sap, Eszterhazy said, "Well, now, you have aroused my curiosity —" He paused.

"Hanszlo Horvath. I know yours. Lord Professor Doctor Eszterhazy."

"I am pleased to meet you, sir. And, oh, simply 'Dr. Eszterhazy' I have never been 'Lord,' my grandfather, yes; not I. And, really, never 'Professor,' either, though I have taught a class or two. Well, now, but what is it that the peasant man does when he comes in from his work?"

Horvath guffawed. "Well, then the woman pulls off his boots. And he breaks wind. And she says, 'Be glad for good health.' Ho ho ho!"

"Ha ha ha!"

"Huh huh huh! Well! So you see, sir. One could hardly tell that story in mixed company among the gentry."

"No, no. Certainly not." Among the gentry, no. And among the aristocracy? Certainly. Well, never mind. "What is that large building there? — down over *there*? I don't remember it from my last visit, a few years ago."

Hanszlo Horvath said, which one? that one? (There was only one in sight.) Ah. *That* one. That was the new mill. The new mill? Yes. Some very clever chap from Bella, an engineer chap, had put it up. A faint bell rang in his companion's head. "After all and why not?" declaimed Horvath, his voice ringing and echoing in the gorge down the sides of which they made their way on the old track, half-trail, half-stairs. "Why should all those things be found in Russia and Prussia, why shouldn't we have them here, too?" He gestured. Following the movement, Eszterhazy saw a newly-painted sign. **Great Tuned Harmonic Turbine and Compressed-Air Engine Industrial and Manufacturing Association, Stg.** Sure enough. **Stg.** This was the latest attempt to get Scythia-Pannoina-Transbalkania into the ranks of modern commerce; **Stg.** was the equivalent of **Inc.**, of **Ltd.**, of

**Pty.**, and it stood for **Stockholding**.

"Sure enough. Well. Horvath, shall we go and have a look?"

"Might's well," said Horvath. " 'Be glad for good health!' ha ha!"

The tuned harmonic etc. water-power plant was now established, and a factory with ample space had now been established, too. Ample . . . and empty, too. What was to be done with it? What use to be made of it? Brozz was with difficulty brought to bring his mind to bear upon this problem, and, indeed, could not easily recognize it as a problem at all. *He* would have been immensely content simply to watch his engines enginating all the day long, without other consideration. But it had all, after all, been brought into being by a Syndicate largely commercial in nature, and the commercial members of the Syndicate (or Association) had other ideas. They had after all raised what would in other parts of the world have been a lot of money; to the Triune Monarchy — where wealth still tended to be counted in terms of acres and arpents and horses and horned cattle — it was an immense amount of money. The resources of the European industrial world had been summoned to supply the machinery; and if most of it had come from England and Scotland (most of it *had*), some of it had come from Prussia (none of it from Russia), Belgium, Switzerland, and Sweden. So. Set up, was it. Excellent. What next. Brozz had no idea.

Brozz had no idea, but other Stockholders had, and they brought forward one Herra Gumprecht Ruprecht, a foreign thread-spinner. Herra Gumprecht Ruprecht was in search of cheap fibre, cheap labor, cheap space, and — the possibility suddenly occurring — cheap power. The heavy-smelling Upland wool was coarse, coarse, coarse; and . . . perhaps for that reason . . . it was cheap, cheap, cheap. True that for every white strand in a typical clip of fleece of Upland wool there was a grey, a yellow, a brown, and several black strands: but this was all perfectly suited to Herra Gumprecht Ruprecht's plan, which was to supply thread to weave druggets. And druggets, laid upon the floors — not the floors of palaces or villas (well, perhaps on the floors of the servants' quarters of palaces or villas) — and trod upon by many muddy boots, required to be no color *but* black. Or blackish-brown. And the darker the wool, the less needed dark dye. Dye is money. Druggets often had a cotton woof; it was now proposed to use *hemp*. Perhaps hemp grew in Egypt . . . America . . . India . . . it also grew in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania. And cotton did not.

Brozz nodded civilly as Eszterhazy, accompanied by Horvath, appeared. The engineer was supervising the installation of some item and had just called, "A full meter clearance on all sides" to the work-crew. Now he said, as calmly (and as abstractedly) as though they were again (or still) in the suburbs of Bella, "You see very clean it all is."

"I do see. Yes."

"No fire. No smoke. No cinders. No ash."

"None. True." He didn't add, And no reason why your absurd engine should *work*, either. . . . For if it *did* work, what then? Then it did. And that was that. Brozz was after all the engineer. Eszterhazy had after all not gone over the patents, the blue-prints, plans, specifications, calculations. What he had heard and seen in Bella hadn't persuaded him that it ought all to work — at least not on any large and practical scale. Did it really? Well, well, they would see. Wouldn't they? Now all he said was, "And the water is nice and clean, too."

A very faint cloud came over the face of Engineer Brozz. "Sometimes there is sludge," he said. Eszterhazy was about to ask about this when two gentlemen, investors, board members, appeared, and — seeing new faces — bore them away to the board room, produced cold beer, produced a neatly printed prospectus and an application for the purchase of shares. As he had left the engine-room Eszterhazy had heard Brozz say, yet again, "A full meter clearance on all sides." And then he had heard Brozz catch his breath and he saw Brozz kick something. Heard Brozz say, "I won't have this." The doors closed. Rather odd.

But perhaps not.

There was nothing in the least odd about the way the investment possibility was urged, but something else was odd . . . definitely so . . . Eszterhazy could not at first have said why. Walls were rising for the new mill-pond, which should produce a very high head of water indeed. Eventually. It was Summer, the water was down, it was more easily diverted to allow the work to go on. What was odd, then? Something certainly was. He sought out Brozz, after they had left the board room. What was the projected height of the new wall? . . . of the new mill-pond? Ah, *that* high. That was more like a lake than a pond! Yes, one had to be assured of a good store and a good fall of water. A good high head of it. It would not of course all be contained by the wall, the dam. The natural features of the landscape would also serve to impound the water? Yes, of course, quite. The vale —

*beside a grove, standing in a vale*

"Excuse me, Engineer. But, ah . . . ah . . . it seems to me that the new lake or pond or — that it would, if my hasty mental calculations are correct — that it would drown the Sacred Grove. Eh?"

Brozz gave him an abstracted look, turned away, called, "A full meter clearance on all sides;" turned back. "Excuse me, one must repeat things very often, else they may not be done. What did you ask? Flood the . . . the what?"

"The Sacred Grove."

The engineer's eyes looked into his own. "What is the Sacred Grove?" Brozz asked.

Perhaps it was not so surprising that the man *had* never heard of the place; were there not many people who *had* and yet had never heard of a vacuum-

pump or a compressed-air engine? Brozz had, to be sure, seen the site; he had seen every square meter round about; to him, however, it had been merely a natural declivity in which water might be impounded and made to fall from a considerable height. Its historical associations literally meant nothing to him, and neither did other possible uses for the water. It had seemed to Eszterhazy, and he could not refrain from mentioning the results of his quick calculations, that the water might more profitably be used to turn a dynamo and generate electricity. But this conveyed no more to Brozz than had the phrase *the sacred grove*; his mind for twenty years had been bent in one direction, and it could not now be bent into another. The huge brass and bronze engine parts, the immense segments of iron and steel moved incessantly; the fly-wheel, the walking-beam, the revolving-flying globes, the cogs and all the rest of the equipment. "And all so clean!" over and over again was Brozz's exclamation. "No fire, no smoke, no ash, no cinders: only water and air! So clean! So clean!" (What was a little sludge?) See the great tuned turbine turn!

There was certainly a deal of merit in what he said. Eszterhazy had seen the Black Country of England and its continental equivalents; to compare it to Hell was a simile in a state of fatigue, but what other comparison was there? Pillars of cloud, black cloud, by day, and pillars of fire, red fire, by night. Soot falling down like snow, the earth riven open for coal. If indeed it were possible for the inevitable degree of industrialization which the country must experience to be based on water and air, well, so much the better. It would be too bad about the sacred grove or Sacred Grove; one could not have everything, of course. The changes along the Little River and its tributaries would be considerable.

Would, eventually, inevitably, be immense.

Must be immense.

And not there alone.

Eszterhazy realized this, and with something less than an absence of total discontent. But he reassured himself, as most would, that change was inevitable — and, in this instance, that change was at least to be minimized. The earth need not be wounded to yield coal, the forests need not be ravished to supply firewood. Only that the water, flowing anyway, would flow through channels. And, if no man ever bathed twice in the same river, the river having meanwhile flowed on; well, the same river would never turn any wheel twice. And, so, what of that?

Nothing.

Back at the Inn of St. Mammás, there on his desk was the Avar-Ister newspaper, folded, as he had left it, to the classified notices. And there, in the right hand margin, next to the pencil-mark he had made, was *this*:

Dr. Szilk will receive into his own home a very few gentlemen as

residential private patients. Secure care. Full board. Excellent attention. The Rose-colored House, 102 Great St. Gabriel Street near Pannonian Gate.

Why had he marked *this*? There were always such notices in the newspapers; oh very well, there were always such *advertizements*: not always as discreetly worded as Dr. Szilk's was. It was not clear if his "private patients" were shrieking mad or merely moody or nervous. But this was the key to something which had been locked a while in Dr. Eszterhazy's mind. Dr. Szilk's sanatorium in Avar-Ister — had he ever visited there? No. But he had visited others like it, in (for example) Dr. Rothenbueler's, in Bella.

Among the particular ideas of Dr. Rothenbueler's in Bella was that tight clothes were too unhealthy, dark clothes too depressing, bright clothes too exciting. And there, on a visit a few years ago . . . a tall, thin man . . . loose light-grey jacket and loose tan trousers . . . a mere glance. But now proving enough to identify. So. Engineer Brozz had once been treated for a crisis of nerves, eh? This might account for much. And it might account for . . . currently . . . nothing. Nothing at all.

Nothing.

Eszterhazy was now a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Literature; at times he felt rather as Petrarch must have felt when, having gone all the way to — was it Ghent? — in order to copy a rare text of — was it Cicero? — he discovered that he could get no ink in Ghent. How could they have managed without ink in Ghent? Well, perhaps they had not needed ink just then: one did not copy texts of Cicero every day. Agreed. But — Ghent was a commercial center of no mean size; how had they kept their records? The answer might have been that they used tally-sticks. And not ledgers. It was certainly more easy to make tally-sticks than to make ink; however, one could not copy a rare text with a tally-stick.

Still. Was there not somewhere in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania where the tally-stick was still in use? What had this to do with a degree of Doctor of Literature? Eszterhazy decided to adopt for his little motto, *Often pause and turn aside*. And, having paused and turned aside, he recollected that the tally-stick was still in use in the hills behind Gro. Gro. What . . . ? He consulted his scrapbooks. This, what: *and in the Late Pre-Christian Era Gro prospered from the Slovatchko Pilgrimages, as the then-pagan Slovatchkoes passed through on their way to a sacred grove where they worshipped their Twin Gods: Charnibog the Dark and Byellibog the Bright*. Ah, yes, that Sacred Grove again. Peasant unrest again. It was time to look into it again. It was time to consult Grekkor again; Grekkor was an ox-drover who had advanced to being a cattle-buyer, knew the region behind Gro, the Preez country, in and out. Grekkor was often in Bella, was he in Bella just now? He was. And that afternoon he came and brought Eszterhazy up to date on the dam.



The work on the dam was proceeding, but it could not be said that the work on the dam was proceeding in all respects smoothly. An official, or at any rate a semi-official, protest had come from the priest of the chapel in the grove — officially the Chapel of Sts. Ulfilas and Methodius. Was this ancient shrine, dedicated to the holy missionaries to the Goths and Slavs, was it to be drowned and flooded in order to enable (so the complaint went) the dung-locks of sheep to be spun more expeditiously . . . and more cheaply? But Prince Preez had perhaps been anticipating this, perhaps Prince Preez had already spoken words into ecclesiastical ears: at any rate directions were given that shrine and chapel be removed to higher ground: and, as these directions came from the Bishop, that took care of the objections of the priest. Further remonstrances, that the people were all accustomed from the most ancient times to affix certain bits of cloth to the trees in the grove when they made their petitions and said their prayers, and that they would no longer be able to do so if the trees were flooded and drowned — these remonstrances were met with pontifical censure of a sternness which had not been anticipated. Such customs were superstitious, such customs were heathen and pagan and perhaps even heretical, such customs were best abandoned, and the sooner they were abandoned the better. Penitence, prayer, and charity did not, could not, should not depend on such rites and rituals. The Bishop did not indeed say, *Off with their heads!*; bishops could hardly say such things nowadays; but there were things which bishops could say nowadays; and this Bishop said them: those who persisted in making agitations on the subject (this Bishop said) could hardly expect to apply for dispensations to marry their second cousins. And, as the people in those parts very often *did* apply for dispensations to marry their second cousins, in order to keep old-time properties within the family, resistance ceased.

Or, to employ another terminology, resistance went underground.

Dr. Eszterhazy listened. He asked, "And so the people —?"

"They won't work on that dam. Goths, Avars, Slovatchkoes, none of them people will work on it. Brought up a team of navvies from The City," *Bella* being understood, "and almost directly, *they* downed tools and made their own way back. I don't know exactly *where* in Hyperborea they found the bunch of backwoodsmen they got working now —"

Eszterhazy's face showed his surprise. "What? Oh, but surely the Hyperboreans are just as prone to superstition as —"

"Oh, *more*, far as that goes, sir. *But they have different superstitions!*"

Oh. Well. Hmm. Yes. They *had*. An oak-grove by the river's brim a simple oak-grove was to them. And nothing more. "So. And so the people in the mountains close around? Have they offered any violence? Any —"

"'Offered,' yes. But, well, the Stockholding folk, they've got the Rural Constabulary on guard. And then Prince Preez, he's got his own men on guard, too. Mind you, no, they won't do a lick of work themselves on this

dam. But they keep the others, the locals, from interfering. Prince Preez, he can't call out the *corvée* no more, but . . ."

Prince Preez. As far as living in the country, in his own country, was concerned, Prince Preez could hardly need spend a *kopperka* from one year to another. Food, wine, wood, even woolen and linen cloth, all were supplied by his own tenantry as part of rent. But Prince Preez did not care to spend all his time on his estates, in his house in Avar-Ister, his house in Bella. More and more often of recent years Prince Preez, glossy-red-faced Prince Preez, liked to travel to Vienna, to Florence, to Paris. To tarry on the Riviera. To turn a hand of cards. Throw a cup of dice. . . .

To *live* . . . as it was called.

All this was increasingly costly (Prince Preez did not always *win!*) and Prince Preez could not pay the costs by giving the railroad a wild boar, however neatly gutted, or even a score of wild boar; his foreign hotels would not take homespun or hogsheads of sour crout or souse; he could not trade his own vineyards' bullblood wine for champagne. He could not cover the stakes at the casino with cordwood, game, venison, or veal, or ever so many wagonloads of barley. All this required *cash*. Therefore Theobald Dieterich Gabriel Mario Maurits, eleventh Prince Preez, had given a 99-year lease to the new Company, wherefore the new Company had made him a Stockholder in the Stockholding and as soon as the Stockholding produced profits the prince would receive Dividends in the form of cash. *Cash*.

Until then? Until then, nothing.

Hence the huntsmen of Prince Preez and the herdsmen of Prince Preez and the housemen of Prince Preez, lots and lots of them, in their linen and leather livery of red and brown, with their boar-spears and their muskets and their shotguns and their whips and their dirks and their axes and their cudgels: and all on guard. Night and day. Day and night.

But scarcely had Eszterhazy assimilated this, gotten the picture of it formed in his mind, when — "And then there's them gingerbread men, sir."

" 'And then' — *what?* There's *what?* "

So it was that Engelbert Kristoffr Klaudius Eszterhazy, with his baccalaureate, his licentiate, and his (by now) four doctorates, learned of the peculiar — and, rather, pitiful — form of protest to which the people of the mountain had been reduced. Grekkor thought perhaps they had used their children (their very small children) to smuggle these mute protests past the piquets and patrols . . . could there be a milder or a more moderate protest than these edible dolls which it was customary to enjoy in the Sacred Grove? — leaving, of course, a piece behind, uneaten, perhaps by way of quit-rent for the privilege — a more humble reminder? Hardly . . . though . . . even so . . . how even small children managed to get past the lines of guards, with their fires and their torches and their lamps and their lanterns, was a wonder. It was a great wonder.

\* \* \*

Later on.

There had been an outbreak of the ailment commonly called "coals of fire," or, in a fancier word, 'anthrax; and Eszterhazy, both as a qualified physician and as a member of the Higher Consultancy of the Royal and Imperial Hospital (commonly called "The Big Sickhouse"), had been discussing the outbreak with Doctor Umglotz, the Assistant Supervisor. Umglotz declared himself to be a "regular old-fashioned physician," given to the traditional and the tried and true. None of your fads for Umglotz.

"Bleeding, blistering, cupping, purging," he said. "If they don't work, well, then nothing works."

Eszterhazy nodded. "I see. Well, which have you tried for anthrax?"

"Tried all of them."

"I see. Well, which one works?"

"None of them works," said Umglotz, with immense calm.

And he was quite right. None of them *did* work. Reading the write-ups on the afflicted, Eszterhazy observed something else. "All of the victims, Doctor, are employed at the Ister Woolen Works, it seems."

"They are? Yes, yes. I see. They are. Well. No surprise. Where folk are working in that line — where you find wool and hair, you know, well, there you find anthrax. Dirty work. The beasts of the field, my good Eszterhazy, they do not employ the *shower-bath*," he employed the English term: the shower-bath was not greatly used in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania; "but what would you? We cannot always wear cotton and linen. Every trade has its troubles, hatters go mad from the felting-mercury, vintners die from the acid gas in the great vats, trainmen are smashed in wrecks, and . . . and . . . and so it goes. Hazards of the chase, my good Eszterhazy, hazards of the chase. The dirt of the wool and hair get into the lungs. The sick, like the poor, are always with us, you know. Else what should we physician fellows do for our living; eh?" He shrugged and chuckled, then made to ring his bell. "Our good Royal and Imperial master sends us here regularly a pipe of excellent Rainwater madeira, and I am going to make you drink a glass of it before you go."

His good Eszterhazy knew better than to suggest that even a glass of it be sent instead to one of the dying. "Willingly," he said. Then his head jerked. "A sudden thought, Assistant Supervisor. When wool-working was what the English term 'a cottage industry,' when a single family raised sheep, sheared, carded, spun, wove, and all —"

Umglotz rang his bell, begged his good Eszterhazy's pardon. "Yes, yes, quite. Go on, please." Eszterhazy went on to say that in such a situation, if a family had the misfortune to encounter a tainted fleece, the outbreak of anthrax might be at least contained within that cottage and family. Whereas, when a tainted fleece was worked upon by an entire factory-full of people —

"Yes, yes. Quite. I quite see your point. Well, what would you? People don't want to stay in their cottage. They want to come to our beautiful,

exciting Big Bella. And who can blame them; not I. Ah, here it is! Let me fill your glass. Sercial is nice, Bual is nice, but as the Emperor is benevolent enough to send us Rainwater, I am loyal enough to maintain that Rainwater is the nicest madeira of all; drink up, my good Eszterhazy. Drink up!"

Having drunk up, and having declined a second glass, and acknowledging that being sent on one's way with a glass of good wine was better than being kicked down a flight of stairs, Eszterhazy nevertheless left The Big Sick-house with a rather disturbing trend of thought still trending its way through his mind. Not even the beautiful, reflective Ister, of the sight of which anywhere on its course he never tired, was able to distract him. Excellent as Engineer Brozz's intentions were to provide his native nation with a new (and clean) system of power and manufactory, there seemed always some objection, and always some further objection, to arise. And it was of this, in general, and of this latest potential objection in particular, of which he thought and was thinking as he made his way over the beautiful Swedish Bridge, towards his home.

He was *not* thinking of what the Honorable Hiram Abiff Abercrombie, sometime United States Minister to the Triune Monarchy, termed The Remarkable Law of Coincidence as Exemplified by One-Legged Men Wearing Blue Baseball Caps. General Abercrombie (who had been drinking prune brandy purely, as he said, to "maintain the integrity of his intestineal tract") explained that baseball was a game native to his own Great Republic, that the players wore caps of various colors, that such caps were sometimes worn by men not at the moment playing baseball, that you might go a hundred years without seeing a single one-legged man wearing a *blue* baseball cap, and that — tarnation! — one afternoon you'll see three of them! And Abercrombie was moved to explain to his young friend Elmer Bert the full details of a great game of baseball played on the 4th of July in the year 1800 and 63, at Fort Fillmore, Missoula Territory, between the *15th Mounted Infantry* and *Indian Friendlies*: but his young friend (without much difficulty) persuaded him to have another glass of prune brandy for his stomach's sake. And for his other infirmities.

Yet something of this so-called Law seemed to be at work; for, on Eszterhazy's having barely attained his chamber, there entered Kresht, the day porter, with a card on the flat palm of his hand. (Kresht, later succeeded by Lemkotch, had been provided with a tray for this purpose, but had persisted in using the tray as a way-stop for his glass of coffee, his glass of borsht, and his glass of tea with sliced citron and cherry preserve; until he had finally been excused the use of the tray for holding cards at all.) And the card, engraved in a crisp script, read *Engineer Hildebert V. B. Brozz*.

"Bring the gentleman up, Kresht."

"Yurp, Lord Doctor." And, having brought the gentleman up, Kresht brought himself down again, there to devote himself to his glass of rye-bread-beer, his glass of raspberry juice and hot water, and his glass of what-

ever else was his by kindness of the upper-kitchen woman with whom he had formed an entangling alliance. Kresht was later (not much later) succeeded by Lemkotch, who never drank anything at all . . . except whatever was in the flat black bottle which reposed in the pocket of his overcoat hanging Winter and Summer in the lower front hall closet: and for this Lemkotch required neither glass nor tray.

But as for Brozz —

Brozz did not look well.

"How are the tuned harmonic turbine, the vacuum-pump, and the compressed-air engine, Engineer?"

Engineer made a gesture. "I have not come to consult you about that. At least . . . not exactly. I have come to consult you as a doctor of medicine."

Again . . . was it that absurd "Law"?

"I am such, it is true, certainly. But it is certainly true that I became such chiefly to mark a milestone on the march to knowledge, not to practice and have patients. Have you consulted, for instance," naming a well-known and "modern" physician, "Dr. Slawk?"

"I have."

"And what did he say?"

"That my liver was out of order. And he offered me a black pill." Brozz gazed at the beautifully-articulated skeleton in its cabinet, but its beautiful articulations did not seem to soothe him.

"Hmm. Well, but — Dr. Hrach?"

"Dr. Hrach, too."

"And he —?"

"Said that my bowels were sluggish. And offered me a blue pill."

There was one more suggestion to make, and Eszterhazy made it. "The Scottish surgeon is —"

"Dr. MacIlllivery. Oh yes. Him, too. He said that the acid in green tea, when over-indulged in, affected the connective fibre of the nervous tissue. Have I over-indulged in the use of green tea? Sir, I have never indulged in green tea at all. And as for the witch —"

It followed. "Yes. 'As for the witch'?"

Engineer Brozz took a slip of paper from a small leather pocket-case. "I wrote it down." He read aloud. "'*Water is thy greater fortune; and water, thy greater infortune as well.*' Now, what does that mean, my good sir?"

Eszterhazy began to say that it meant that she must have been a rather sophisticated witch; desisted. Surrendered. "Any pains in the small of the back? Any swellings of feet or ankles? Any difficulty in making —? No, eh. We may dismiss a kidney condition or the like. Hmm. Did the witch say anything else?" For sometimes the witch was only a dirty and mean old man or woman, yet sometimes the witch was something else; sometimes a good deal more.

"'Say anything else'? Yes. 'Cross my palm with silver, handsome Chris-

tian gentleman.”

Eszterhazy sighed. “Well, well. Be kind enough to loosen your cuffs and collar, and to open your coat, waistcoat, and shirt. Yes. Just so. Say nothing until I tell you to.” The pulse was taken, the stethoscopic horn applied. At length Dr. Eszterhazy said, “There are some occasional, very minor, irregularities, but nothing very divergent from the norm. Pulse, heart, are both strong. Respiration normal. Do you sleep well? Can you eat? Does your vision waver? Any problem in hearing? — you never feel that others are mumbling? Your lungs seem sound.” He withdrew the thermometer from the armpit. “Normal. Your eyes are only slightly bloodshot. Well. I can tell you nothing more; what is it that you can tell *me*?”

Brozz looked away from the skeleton, looked at the two immense terrestrial and celestial globes. Brozz muttered something very low. He let out his breath in a sudden gust. Jerked his head abruptly from side to side, twice. Then threw out his right hand in a bewildered gesture. “Listen, Doctor, I don’t know if you remember, or if you ever saw, perhaps you never saw, years ago there was a mountebank, sometimes he used to stand at the corner of the alley between the Big Wood Market and the Old Stillery, a *very odd chap* —”

Eszterhazy’s frown of concentration melted away. “Yes! A *very odd chap*!” His fingers now moved in a rather peculiar manner, wriggling, jerking, bobbing; and he made a crooning sound, a not-quite tune. The effect upon the engineer was not pleasant. His lips and eyelids seemed to snap back. He made a wavering, wordless sound in his throat. Then his widened eyes darted down past the physician’s moving fingers, down . . . almost . . . to the carpet-covered floor. And next he uttered a shuddering sigh and for a while remained silent.

*The mountebank*, yes. He did not, literally, mount a bench. No matter. Who was he? Whence had he come? Whence *had* he come? Whither had he gone? Was he still alive? A slight and sallow man, almost dark his face was, and the skin around his eyes was dark indeed. In all weather he wore a short waistcoat exposing much not-very-clean shirt. His trick? Out of scraps of heavy colored paper a sort of doll or puppet had been made, and from any distance at all it seemed as though the man’s mesmeric gestures caused the one-dimensional doll to dance at his command. From right next to him (and only sometimes was he at the corner of the alley between the Big Wood Market and the Old Stillery; sometimes he stood by Sellzer’s Spelt Stores or Klungman’s Bristles For Brushes, or near the Old Little Uniate Chapel, or the Sailors’ Rest) from right next to him it was apparent that a single thread from his right hand kept the marionette up and that threads from each finger of his left hand made head, arms, and legs move and caper. And all the while the odd man keened his odd sub-song. He never indeed seemed to collect much money . . . but then his invested capital was minimal. And his rent was nothing at all. And now Eszterhazy shared the memory of him.

And patiently waited.

"You see," Brozz said, by and by, "first I attended the old Bella Pantechnical School in Upper Hunyadi Street. Then I went to Scotland and worked with Watt and Grant, the great engineering firm in Glasgow and Edinburgh, and next my work was with British Looms Ltd. in Manchester and in Sheffield at Stanley Steel; and I may say: what there was to be learned about machinery, I learned it. I studied in London and in Brussels and Berlin. It was during those years I began to think about the tuned harmonic turbine and the vacuum-pump and the compressed-air engine. When they first began the advanced technical studies here at the Collegium, I returned and obtained the engineer degree. . . .

"My entire adult life, my professional and personal and philosophical *res*; well, though I was raised in the Calvinist Reformed Church, I am not very religious, my nature is purely pragmatic and rational, and absolutely I have not a trace of superstition in my nature. So . . . when I say . . . you will not assume that I . . . do I not impress you as sane?"

"As perfectly sane." Brozz may not have been as pragmatic as he thought; but he was certainly sane. Or *seemed* so. So far. Still . . .

"So when I say that I am —" He did not precisely pause or hesitate; only, his voice stopped.

Eszterhazy produced and proffered the (possibly) missing word.

"— haunted —"

Brozz did not react other than to resume speaking. "I am haunted," he said, in a dull, dead voice. His face was thinner than ever.

"You are haunted by paper puppets?"

The man's face showed, fleetingly, first surprise; then, though quickly suppressed, annoyance. "No! What? 'Paper puppets'? No, sir, what makes you think — Oh, I see, I understand. No, *that*," he moved his own fingers in the manner of the mountebank (if this were not too high a title to have given him, poor starveling wretch); "*that* merely reminded. *That* — reminded me of . . . the other. And . . . the other . . . reminded me of . . . *that*. But no. If I tell you that I am haunted by, oh, ghosts, revenants, vampires, werewolves — whatever — you . . . or anyone . . . might not believe. But even if you were scornful, it would be with a serious scorn. Yet . . ." He looked up, helplessly, as though, almost, his sense of horror was mixed with an equal sense of humiliation.

"At first, merely I saw them by one or two. Just lying around. I thought the workmen had been slipshod, careless. Then these things came more often, and more and more often. Soon one began to realize they were getting into the water supply, dissolving into a sludge, clogging . . . sometimes . . . clogging the machines. And also clogging them with stones, pebbles, fragments of splints. And then next I began to see them out of the corners of my eyes, moving . . . moving . . . walking . . . and when I would, often, at night, lose my self-control and chase after them. . . ." His words ended in a soft sound half-sigh,

half-groan.

Even softer: "Yes?"

"... they would run away . . . and never . . . I could never catch them . . ." His voice had sunk, now it rose. "Who will believe me? Who will ever respect me? They —"

"What are they?"

The engineer's somewhat bloodshot eyes looked at him in a mixture of defiance and shame. "They? What are —? They are the gingerbread men."

Everyone called it "the Old Avar Bakery." But the place itself did not call itself so, the weathered sign had to be read at a certain time of day with the sun at a certain angle, and the sign read THE FAMOUS OLD GINGERBREAD BAKERY AT WHOLESALE AND RETAIL. It read so in Gothic and it read so in Avar. Everyone knew of it; and everyone knew of the Hospice for the Innocents, the orphanage run by the uncloistered nuns. Eszterhazy had brought a large box of the confections for, as he let it be known, to give to the Hospice, and paid cash: all matters disposing the shopman to answer questions. How did they make their excellent gingerbread men? In old cherry-wood molds. Where did the ingredients come from? "Well, sir, the eyes and mouths we make from them tiny raisins that grows in them Turkish islands where the Greeks do live, currants we call 'em, sir." Yes. The isles of Greece and the cities thereof. Corinth. Currant. Yes. And the other ingredients? "Well, sir, the ginger and the m'lasses they comes from India, from the Indies, sir — Virginia and Jamaica and them-like other Indian places. And — and the what, sir? Ah, the flour? Well — no, not from the Bella Steam Mill, that grinding, well, we doesn't care for it a-tall. 'Twon't taste the same, you see. We use old fashioned style flour. Water-ground meal, we uses. Where it comes from? From the old mills way up the Little River. Sir. And mostly the honey, too."

Rain had washed the soot off the carriage windows, but rain allowed very little to be seen as the train made its way, and that little was so wavering as to convey not much. As Eszterhazy pulled a window up and before he pulled it down again he looked upon a sodden landscape. Not far off the trains on the narrow-gauge branch-line seemed to move along like a procession of gondolas crossing the Venetian lagoon. It was after all his own private car and if he cared to keep the window open no one might gainsay him. He did not care: he had a boxful of things to read, and he did not want them rained upon. He would see the scenery later. Another time. When it stopped raining. If it ever did.

Rain in Scythia, rain in Pannonia, rain in Transbalkania — rain in Cisbalkania, for that matter. The rain was falling on the Acropolis and on the black mountain of Montenegro. All the Italian alliances in the world could not keep it from raining on Illyria, nor off the Hungarian shepherds in their shaggy capes. In the soggy delta of the Ister the Romanou gathered in their mucky



huts, close around their smoky fires, ate smoked eels and thoughtfully wiped their fingers in their arm-pits. Here and there and everywhere the Tsiganes headed for drier ground and kept their keen black eyes open for drowned pigs; they had some very good recipes for drowned pig. In Klejn Tinkeldorff, Eszterhazy's Tanta Tina clicked her tongue, and helped the housekeeper hang the washing in the kitchen. And, a few blocks away, Music Master De Metz sat composing motets. He did not know it was raining.

At the last train stop the diligence-driver helped the porter with Eszterhazy's baggage. "I don't know for sure will we be able to get Your Honor to the last stage, this here rain here be so heavy. They say as God be punishing this here district for that bloody new dam as will drown out the Sacred Grove, what a blasphemous thing to do." He shook his head, scattering more rain, as he tight-hauled the rope on the tarpaulin cover for the baggage.

"Why, man," said Eszterhazy, "this rain is falling not just here and not just on our country but all over Eastern Europe; they say it is the heaviest rain in many years."

The driver looked at him doubtfully. "Not just here? Not just on — How does Your Honor know?"

Eszterhazy was not disposed to stand chatting while his clothes grew soaked. "Telegraphic reports," he said. And got inside.

The driver, who had not a hope of keeping dry, looked at him through the window. "Ah. *Télégraph*. Oh." He had no more idea of how the telegraph worked than had a child, but he believed in it as surely as he believed in witchcraft. He pulled down the isinglass window, touched his hat, and mounted to the box. If the mica set into the leather flaps failed to keep out the wet, the passengers might lower the canvas curtains on the inside.

The driver proved right, as such drivers generally do: they had *not* been able to get Eszterhazy to the last stage, and so, leaving his baggage in charge of the manager of the post-station at the last stage but one, he had obtained a horse. It was still only afternoon, "though late, late was the hour," yet the rain and mist and clouds so obscured visibility that he had ridden through many a night with less trouble. There came a time when he felt he might be better going on foot than on the back of a rain-blinded and nervous horse; and dismounted. He had intended to lead the beast, but the beast had other ideas; with a powerful jerk of neck and head it tore the leathers from his slippery hands and, with one last, loud neigh, made off. For a moment he was in fright for it; then, seeing it heading downhill, the way it had come, he thought the animal was likely to arrive safe enough (if wet enough) at its own stable. In a moment he had forgotten the horse and concentrated on keeping to the road.

He could scarcely see; he could hardly hear. It was no mere rainstorm which made the overwhelming sound now beating incessantly upon his ears, and which bothered him more than the wet. When he reached the new factory he would be out of the wet, into dry clothes; but would he be away from the noise? Soon enough he had an answer of sorts, though not the one he would

have hoped for. The road crested at the top of one of the hills, the road was going down, was turning to keep to the river, and —

Lines from an old Scottish poem, again courtesy of his aunt Lady Emma, supplied themselves: *The river was great, and mickle wi' spate*. . . Had they ever seen anything, though, like *this*, in Scotland? He had never before seen anything like it in Scythia-Pannonia-Transbalkania. Incredible sight. The water was a filthy hue of brown; God knows how many farms (in effect) were dissolved in it. To say that the river was swollen was to waste the word. The river had gone mad; the river was insane; the river rioted; and, grown vast and huge, the river seemed to throw challenge at the rainy heavens. There were no banks. There were no bridges. The sound of the waters drowned all other sound, almost it was drowning thought. Limbs of trees hurled and hurtled down that titanic millrace, were thrown high into the air, crashed back down in fume and spray but with no distinct . . . with, even no *indistinct* . . . noise of the fall. Timbers whirled around like straws; several times he saw the forms of cattle appear, whirl, bob, dive, vanish. They must have been long dead by then. And the unstable water made the stable earth tremble and shake.

How could the new dam stand up against all this? Could it? Well, probably. If they, there at the new factory below, so to speak, and alongside the dam, if they opened the sluices and allowed water to escape from the sides as well as over the top. *If* they opened the sluices? By now and in fact long before now, they of course must have.

He had heard much of all the men on guard roundabout this area by night and day, but he saw no one. He saw nothing, neither man nor beast. Animals looking to find refuge on higher ground by now would already have found it . . . found it, or been drowned. The water-birds?, where were they? Somewhere. Somewhere else. Not on the surface of the new-formed lake. He could not soon or easily become used to this new-formed lake. It was too unfamiliar, it was entirely unfamiliar, there was nothing he could recognize —

Stop.

Of course there was.

He recognized the vasty oak trees rising from amidst the waters and knew that he was looking at the Sacred Grove.

How long would and could the Grove's trees survive, half-sunk beneath the waters as they were? He did not know. Bit by bit and very cautiously he advanced, but it was not easy; the road had become in part a stream-bed, and where not that, a mud-slick. And yet (he saw) he had been rather wrong, for there were living beings moving about; what were they? Children, very small children? No. Marmots, perhaps? Perhaps marmots, moving en masse in search of safety? Were there marmots here? Ground-squirrels, perhaps? And yet why did he keep thinking that they might be children, when plainly they could not and —

He saw them coming and increasing. He saw them coming on. He saw them coming, like an army of tiny brown pygmies, waving their stumpy

ginger-red-brown arms. Their tiny black-marked mouths opening, wordlessly for all he could hear above the pouring rains and rushing waters. Had they something, each, in their small and fingerless hands? Were those mere meaningless motions, movements, gestures? Were they, seemingly, threatening? Stabbing? Against whom? Against what?

And as he watched, body wet and cold and numb, repeatedly dashing the rain from his forehead, again and again mopping his smarting eyes with his sodden sleeves, he saw the ranks . . . Deucalion's Flood? who had thrown the stones from which this race had sprung? or sown the dragon's teeth? . . . saw the ranks waver, saw them tremble. Saw them melt, melting away. Ebb. Fade. Vanish. Gone.

Had he seen it? How could he have seen it? He could not have seen it, therefore he had not seen it. *Not.*

But how close it had seemed to come to him . . . as close as . . . as that tree. His eyes sank from the rain-soaked bark and bole of the ancient oak (surely of course not one of those there during the ancient days: but how far removed? perhaps grown of an acorn of an oak of an acorn from one of the pagan oaks: only three removes; what said Solomon? *a three-fold cord is not easily broken*), his eyes sank to the ground. He took a step forward, and another, through the quaggy mud and mire. A brown mass overlay the rain-flattened grass. Mud. Merely mud? Ginger-red-brown mud, where all other mud was black? Did it not look rather like melted meal and spice and —? And another flash, and on the ground something sparkled, sparkling here and sparkling there: mica, it was surely mica, small deposits of it lay all about here and there in this region. Mica. *Was it?* Heedless of the sheets of rain pelting his back, he bent, almost knelt, and picked something up. And another. And another. Incredulous, he felt something a moment later sting his spasmodically closing hand. He forced his fist to open. There among the muck and grass and blood he saw, by lightning flashes, tiny points of sharp flint. *Sharpened flint. Flints.* He turned and fled, tottering and slipping; he turned and fled.

Then he turned around again. Turned again, saw again, screamed again, fled again. *Turned again.* There in the gloom, half dark air and half dark water, he saw them again. *Them:* Again they surged forward, again their stone weapons threatened and glistened: again they seemed to melt. He now knew that, whatever they threatened, they did not threaten him. He waited and he waited and the lightnings flashed quite nearby and it was as though — had a signal been given? — had the electric surges animated something inanimate? *that which is formless giving form to that which becomes formed?* To some sort of primal slime, out of some sort of primal sludge? The *them* were larger now, ever so much larger, they were human-sized now, their weapons were larger, still they came on, as rough-shaped, still, as (indeed) the gingerbread-men for ages eaten in this grove, parts of them always left uneaten. An arm. A hand. Head. Leg. He followed, stumbling. Warning himself. Must watch himself. Watch yourself, man. Watch your step. Don't fall or

slip. The river. The lake.

(Where, now, were the herdsmen, housemen, huntsmen of Prince Preez? And if they had been here, what might they do? Pursue? The words rang in Eszterhazy's ears, *You can't catch me, said the gingerbread man!*)

Once again the crude Them sank sodden and collapsed. Once more he waited, while the river and (he must suppose) the spillway of the dam roared and thundered. And once more he saw the Figures rise and take form out of the earth, wavering, become firm. Their faces no longer toy-like, doll-like, their faces giant-like. But they were now ruinous and eroded faces; their forms?

Male, female, sexless, androgynous, furious, faceless (now), huge and vast: and the rains came down and the water roared — the Figures leaped forward into the rain and mirk and were lost to sight. And then the almost all-embracing noise for one horrible moment became utterly all-embracing indeed, something like a cataract in reverse heaved up in torrent, the fountains of the deep were truly broken, the saturated earth trembled and quaked; he sank upon his knees.

When he had recovered and was able to stand, though the rains had dwindled to drizzles, though still the waters rushed and foamed, they had ceased to roar and now they only loudly groaned and droned. Thick mud such as might have greeted the eyes of Noah lay all about the Sacred Grove, where . . . long and long ago . . . the ancient Avars and Slovatchkoes and Goths, sometimes together and sometimes apart, had come to perform their heathen rituals, to honor God in the plural before ever they had ever learned to honor God in the singular . . . and, before, even, then, whatever ancient-most kiths and races had dwelt here then: proto-Pelasgians, perhaps, or ur-Hyperboreans and paleo-pagans whose very names were lost . . . but only mud lay round about the giant oak-trees now. The lake was gone. The pond below was gone. The millrace was gone. Save for a shattered stone groin, the dam was gone. The factory was entirely gone. Stripped of limbs and branches, trunks of trees lay here and there in heaps like giant jackstraws. It was far later and far downstream that, the sun shining as though there had never been rain, Eszterhazy encountered a broken (broken? *shattered!*) piece of machinery which he did not at first recognize. By and by he saw that it had belonged to one of the sluices. *The sluices!* Why had not the sluices been opened to relieve the enormous pressure of the waters inside the dam? He saw the answer to the question which not he alone had raised. The smashed joint or whatever it was had not been opened because it could not have been opened because, doubtless they had tried, but it was jammed shut. And with what, Dr. Eszterhazy now saw.

Aloud he repeated the words, once, long *long* ago (it seemed now) of Engineer Brozz: repeated them aloud: "Stone, pebbles, fragments of splints" For there they were indeed, there (jammed, crammed) the stones, there the

pebbles, and there the — “ ‘Fragments of *splints*? ” he cried. What had that meant? Nothing; it was gibberish; his ears had deceived themselves and him. *Fragments of flints*, was what the man had said. Fragments of *flints*. Had, simply, the encroaching waters simply opened up and washed down the remnants of some Stone Age encampment or workshop, or — No. He knew what he had seen.

He looked at the flints. Some of the fracture-lines were new, others as clearly *not*. What trove, troves, of Neolithic, perhaps even Paleolithic weaponry of chipped stone, flaked flint, had lain in the Scared Grove? as though ancient sacrificers and sacrificial victims had taken once and again, time and again, need never take again, an immense and ultimate revenge against the immolation of that gateway between Gods and men, the Sacred Grove.

Was that what had happened? What *had* happened? What had he *seen*? Well, he knew of course what he had seen. But what did it mean? Unbidden, words, entire lines, from the *Addendum to Procopius*, came to his mind as he stood there in the drying mud.

Another reason which justified Justinian’s waging war upon the Goths was their savage rites and customs, totally against religion and morality. For example, in the mountains of Eastern Scythia in a sacred grove by a sacred well or spring, the barbaric Goths are wont to select certain prisoners by lot and to let them loose and to pursue after them. The wretches unfortunate enough to be captured are not alone immolated to the demons who dwelt in the place sacred to them, but portions of their flesh are cooked and eaten. Others say, eaten raw. It is true that some so-called Christians who should know better maintain that though such a cruel rite once pertained there, it had been abolished after the Gothic incursion, and that the Goths themselves merely made effigies of meal and honey and it is these which they consume.

*Effigies of meal and honey* : mock-men, that is to say; proxies for the actual humans once actually sacrificed and eaten; the pagan Goths were barbarians, they were not savages. And . . . but . . . *effigies of meal and honey* . . . though it was level daylight and no actual lightnings flashed, something like a stroke of lightning now certainly flashed enlightenment upon him: it was not alone in ancient Gothic times that such “effigies of meal and honey” had been made and eaten, but they had been made and eaten ever since; were still being made and eaten right down to the present day, though no doubt the actual recipe had undergone change, changes. The Christian Church had tried to abolish, but had finally accepted this practice, for *You can’t stop me, said the gingerbread man* . . . !

What had lain slumbering in the groves and woods and waters for centuries, perhaps millennia? Had anything? Had not . . . something? Had it or had they been created out of a sort of spiritual effluvium? as the result of immemorial

worship, and the rites thereof? or had worship (and its rites) resulted because Something was already there? Charnibog, for instance, the so-called Dark God of the ancient Slovatchkoes? or Byellibog, their so-called Bright one? But this was infinitely simplistic, and, perhaps, after all, nothing was there. "Nothing is there!" he cried aloud. And, "There is nothing!" Echo answered, Nothing. . . . Nothing. . . .

But something else answered, as though out of the mist and rain and sunshine and spray: You can't catch *me*, said the —

"There is a spirit in this man," Tanta Tina's old nurse had said.

It was very suddenly that he saw Engineer Brozz. The man was floating in a new-made backwater, floating on his back, so it seemed; but in fact only partly floating. In part something held him up, held him fast; and this gave a slight illusion to the scene: if one had known nothing else one might have wondered why the man had chosen to float, fully clothed, slightly moving his arms and legs.

Much mud and earth and gravel and sand must indeed have flowed upon and lodged upon him, one saw it lying in deposits all around. But, caught as the back of his belt was by the broken point of a limb of a half-sunken tree, suspended from the muck and mirk at the bottom, all debris and detritus had been washed away by the flowing waters, and only some specks of mica glittered and glistened on him here and there. Eszterhazy remembered and spontaneously cried aloud the man's own words:

"So clean! So clean! And all so clean!"

Though the flood was over, there was still an immense quantity of water which lay impounded by banks and shores and tangled masses of trees and other debris — "jams" or "rafts" this was termed in Northamerica; it had not been common enough in this country to take a name — and not far off this water formed a mere. Birds, attracted from far away, rested in flocks on the surface of the mere and flew off now and then, but always returned. Lines from a late Roman Latin poet, the *buxom flood*, repeated themselves endlessly. The waters of this mere now came up within a spit of the road and seemed to swell the landscape: *buxom flood* indeed! Where had these birds all come from? Some of them from the immeasurable willow-thickets of the Ister, some perhaps from lakes in the lower Balkans. Others? Perhaps some infecundation of the waters had created them by spontaneous generation, though this was hardly a modern concept. The mere would soon enough subside, it would all ebb, the scene return to normal; meanwhile one might forget death and terror and avalanches and boulders ripped and trundled; here was green grass, green trees, blue skies, birds of many colors, ripple and lap . . .

*Buxom flood.*

The waters reflected the sky and the sky was an incredible blue, bluer than cornflowers or the blossoms of the chicory (why were all images of it suddenly

botanical?), and all nature lay spent, as though after some episode of great passion.

*Buxom flood.*

"The late deceased learned Engineer was of the Reformed, that is to say, the Calvinist, faith?"

"Yes, Minister."

"Was there not perhaps some line or lines of Holy Scripture to which he was particularly attached? which I might mention in my brief address?"

No one had any reply; then an elderly man in old-fashioned clothing half-livery and half-uniform cleared his throat. "As an Under-sheriff, it's my duty, your reverence, to examine the contents of the clothing of the late deceased. And I find this in his little leather budget as he have in his pocket, wrappit in a piece of oiled cloth. This piece paper, I mean. Ben't it Scripture?"

The minister — he was young and had yet to learn he might not dawdle whilst the impetuous dead were waiting — took the slip of paper and solemnly read it aloud. "'*Water is thy greater fortune; and water, thy greater infortune.*' Hem. This may be Apocrypha, I cannot say; it is certainly not Scripture as defined by the Reformed, or Calvinist, faith. Hem. I shall briefly speak on the versicle, *Above the voice of many waters, mighty waters, breakers of the sea, mightier by far is the Lord on high.* Briefly."

But when he saw how many graves had been dug, and how many were waiting to get into them, he was very brief indeed. ☪



# The Observatory

by George H. Scithers & Patrick L. Price

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TSR, Inc., the company which owns and publishes this magazines along with *Dragon*® and *Strategy & Tactics*® magazines, has been through a difficult period recently. Simply put, we became involved in investments that proved not to be in our best interest, increased facilities and staff to match those new projects, and then found ourselves overextended. The process of trimming down to fit our actual level of sales has been painful but necessary; more to the point, it has been successful: the company is on a sound financial footing again, substantially smaller but far healthier. The company's main business, *DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® and *ADVANCED DUNGEONS & DRAGONS*® and the new *DRAGONLANCE*™ fantasy rôle-playing games, along with other rôle-playing-game products, continue to sell well, particularly in the hobby market. The magazine staff remain intact, *Dragon*® continues to be a very important and profitable part of our operation, and the design staff — as always — are busy developing new games, both hobby-oriented and mass-market.

The name *AMAZING*® *Stories* calls to mind a tradition of science-fiction and fantasy literature that spans sixty years. And it is because of this that Universal City Studios chose to license our magazine's name for its upcoming TV series, being produced by Stephen Spielberg. It is our hope that the new television series will introduce more people to the great tradition of *AMAZING*® *Stories*.

To promote *AMAZING*® *Science Fiction Stories*, we have developed a new product line based on the title. Within the coming year, an anthology, a line of interactive-fiction books, and a calendar will bear the *AMAZING*® logo.

The anthology, entitled *AMAZING*® *Stories: 60 Years of the Best Science Fiction*, will be released this summer. Edited by Isaac Asimov and Martin H. Greenberg, it includes the best stories from the pages of *AMAZING*® *Science Fiction Stories*, some of which date as far back as 1928, two years after the magazine began its publication. Isaac Asimov, Robert Bloch, Philip K. Dick, John Jakes, and Ursula K. Le Guin are among the featured authors. Complementing this selection of stories are an introduction by Dr. Asimov and a full-color section of covers photographed from the original issues of the magazine. This trade paperback is 304 pages in length, and will be available in July, 1985, at the price of \$7.95.

The second feature in the proposed *AMAZING*® product line is a series of interactive-fiction books. For those who are unfamiliar with interactive fiction, it's a type of literature wherein choices must be made at critical points in the story's plot, which in turn affect the outcome of the story. As Buck Coulson recently noted in his "Book Reviews" column, this sort of fiction is very popular among adolescent readers. TSR, Inc., was one of the pioneers in this form of juvenile literature.



The *AMAZING™ Stories* interactive-fiction line is primarily geared to young adults. The books will include a wide range of science fiction, fantasy, and the supernatural. The first two books in the series, *4-D Funhouse* by Clayton Emery and Earl Wajenberg and *Jaguar!* by Morris Simon, are scheduled for release in September, 1985. A second set of two books will be available in October, 1985. Each paperback will be 224 pages in length and will cost \$2.95.

Because artwork has always been an important part of the science-fiction and fantasy fields, we have produced an exciting new product. The *AMAZING™ Stories* 1986 Calendar features thirteen original color paintings, all produced by TSR, Inc., staff artists. Further, there will be a contest, inviting writers to submit short stories based on the artwork. The best submissions will be considered for publication in *AMAZING® Science Fiction Stories*. Contest details and entry form are available on the calendar. This 12" × 12", full-color calendar sells for \$6.95 and will be available in August, 1985.

We're excited about these new additions to the *AMAZING® Stories* line, and we hope that you'll be, too.

Some of you have been kind enough to ask how we manage to provide individual comments on virtually every manuscript that we receive; others have asked the more interesting question: *why* do we do it. We'll try to explain.

The editorial staff here in Philadelphia includes one full-time editor plus six part-time assistant editors — which is somewhat misleading, since the total time spent by the part-timers adds up to around 25 hours a week. In addition to manuscript reading, the Philadelphia staff also assign artwork, send out contracts for stories that we decide to

buy, copyedit and do some proofreading, and decide what story will go on what page in the next issue of the magazine; the Lake Geneva staff — Pat Price *et alii* — typeset, keyline, and proofread each story or article, sell ad space, prepare in-house ads, process subscription orders, communicate manufacturing instructions to our printer, and manage the financial and clerical aspects of magazine production.

It's long been our feeling that information is too valuable to waste, and that we can better judge what's good and what isn't among manuscripts if we put into words what we think is wrong with what we don't like. Further, we've found — by actual experience over the last nine years — that typing out a few comments takes but little more time than what we must spend anyway in reading and processing each manuscript. A few writers take criticism poorly; they write angry letters and try to make life unpleasant for us. But such letters are sometimes merely amusing, sometimes hilarious, occasionally worthy of the letter column (Greener's Law: "Never argue with a man who buys ink by the barrel"), and in any case a small part of what we're paid to cope with.

And on the other hand, we *do* get letters thanking us for taking the time to tell the writer why we didn't like a manuscript — generally three or four such each week. And occasionally, we get a thank-you note that tells us that the story — with repairs and improvements — has been sold to another market.

But the real benefits to us (and to every other editor in the field) are these two: that there will be fewer of the same mistakes, over and over again, being written and circulated; and that there will be more publishable stories — and eventually, more professional writers — available to

work with. We think we're succeeding: the percentage of truly awful manuscripts (known in the trade as "utter oogs" or "oogity-woogities") is definitely dropping, as is the percentage of manuscripts prepared in total ignorance of proper format. At the same time, we're getting many more publishable stories than we have room for; the ones we do buy are all the better for the competition.

Our speed of response has become well-spoken of as well, to the point that we've been kidded about rejecting manuscripts almost before they're out of the typewriter. In fact, we generally turn around manuscripts sent to the Philadelphia address (that is manuscripts from people who actually read the magazine) in around three to five days (plus transit time both ways). Manuscripts sent to the Lake Geneva address (the one listed in various writers' markets and the like) will take up to a couple of weeks longer. Even so, we're among the fastest in the business.

Why? Well, it's one way to persuade writers to try us first. For another, it's no more work — in fact, it's *less* work than allowing a big backlog to pile up. We have to read everything that comes in *anyway* (except for a few things that are too badly typed to read, or which lack provision for return, and similar sins), so we might as well get on with it. It helps to work at home: no transit delays getting to work, quiet surroundings, and above all the opportunity to work late when work starts to pile up. When we *do* let the backlog accumulate, we start getting letters from

understandably-anxious writers — and it takes time to dig out buried manuscripts and answer correspondence — so it is indeed less work to keep the backlog down and the response time *fast*.

Well, could we be a bit nicer in our rejection letters? Yes, but we'd be wasting our time and the time of the people whose pieces of paper are being rejected. By returning a manuscript, we've already given its author a severe jolt. If we told an author that a story is good, and publishable, and we'd buy it if we weren't overstocked, *and* if none of this were true, we'd just be encouraging the author to keep on making the same mistakes — and getting rejected — over and over again. It's far kinder to tell an author what's wrong. (Sometimes, it's not obvious to us what it is that's not working; "This just doesn't hold interest," may be the best we can do. But then, were we infallible judges of how to fix manuscripts, we'd spend our time fixing our own; the pay's better and the hours not so long.)

What tests do we use to judge a manuscript? Nothing fancy; these two are probably the most important: while reading, do we want to keep on reading?, and after reading, do we remember what the story was about? Since we read about 450 manuscripts a month, these are hard tests to pass; but then, a science-fiction writer's lot is not an easy one.

But that's only fair; a science-fiction editor's lot isn't either. Fun, yes; easy . . . no. ☞

*As editors of this magazine, we will continue to read unsolicited, unagented literary material. However, we are not agents of, nor will we forward unpublished literary material to, nor will we even discuss unpublished literary material with Universal City Studios or with any production company associated with those studios or with the television series, Amazing™ Stories.*



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